A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

Jerome Weidman: *Charlotterussenik*
Richard Aldington: *Amateur Painters*
Meyer Levin: *The Married Man*

Wallace Stevens
William March
Marya Zaturenska
Louis Filler

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AUTUMN, 1940

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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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JEROME WEIDMAN:
Charlotterussenik

After his marriage it was impossible to get anybody on Fourth Street to talk about Velvil Pflug's past. He had risen to a position of such prominence on the block that nobody cared to risk his displeasure by discussing openly what Velvil made amply clear was to be considered a closed chapter in his life.

In the early days, right after the War, the people of Fourth Street, especially those between Avenue D and Lewis, had a good deal to say about Velvil Pflug. And it is only fair to record that none of it was complimentary. But that was in the early days.

At that time Velvil Pflug was the most prominent thorn in Fourth Street's collective side. First of all, there were the questions of his origin and his forbears. Fourth Street was almost exclusively Galician. And Mr. Tannenbaum, the marriage broker, whose word was considered final in these matters because of his incredible memory and his calling, was certain that neither of Velvil Pflug's dead parents had come from Galicia In fact, being an outspoken man, Mr. Tannenbaum stated flatly that Velvil's parents had been Litvaks. This was putting it a bit strongly, of course, but that was the way Mr. Tannenbaum always put things. Since all Litvaks who could lay their hands on a stray shred of decency or intelligence lived on Fifth Street, it did not lighten Fourth Street's burden to realize that Velvil Pflug was probably being a thorn in the wrong block's side. Litvak or no, Velvil liked Fourth Street. The fact that Fourth Street didn't like him never seemed to disturb him in the least.

Secondly, there was the question of how he supported himself. It was common knowledge that he sat in regularly at the poker game that Srul Honig ran in his father's apartment on the top floor of the house on the Lewis Street corner. But his luck at cards was what the elder Honig described as "mizzible." It cleared up nothing to have the Honig family, custodians of everybody else's financial secrets, admit ruefully its inability to explain where Velvil got the money that he lost with such regularity at their table. His income, like his parents, was to Fourth Street a mystery.

Yet he always seemed to be well supplied with small sums. His furnished room rent was never in arrears. He owed nobody a penny. He was the best-dressed Galician (or Litvak) in the neighborhood. He changed his laundry daily on a block where clean collars were always a mark of suspicion except on Saturday. He was the first to wear the tremendously popular single-breasted suit, with buttonholes on both sides, that fastened by means of two buttons with a piece of stout thread between them, like a cuff link. And the stripes on his silk shirts were something to see.

Only once, for a short period immediately after the Armistice, did it look as if Velvil Pflug was about to go to work. All the young men of his age who had been in France or in one of the army's training camps had returned to Fourth street to become taxi drivers. For well over a year the block was lined with parked taxicabs from late at night to early morning. There were very few places that the people of Fourth Street had to go to that they could not reach on foot or by means of the Avenue B car, known derisively as the "Pivull-yeh Line," so that nobody ever hired a cab. But in those days the East Side was a sort of farm that supplied the rest of the city with taxi drivers. There was a lot of loose money floating around uptown, tips were heavy, and driving a cab was considered quite a romantic calling for a young man. It was an easy job to fall into after getting out of a uniform. And it was clearly a great aid in what might be euphemistically referred to as courtship.

Velvil Pflug may have been impressed by the success that his taxi-driving cronies were having after business hours with the girls of the neighborhood. With those girls, that is, whose parents did not believe in the efficacy of Mr. Tannenbaum's front parlor. Or he may have begun to find his aimless existence a bit irksome. This latter reason seems, in retrospect, to be rather farfetched. But there were very few cynics on Fourth street and even fewer reasons to go around for a conversation of normal length. So this one was advanced as a sort of painful joke.

The block watched with a good deal of surprise and some grudging approval as he went through the preliminary steps He began to learn to drive and to pay visits to the office of the political captain on Avenue C, where the process of obtaining a license was always started. But Velvil's interest petered out long before the political wheels were set in motion for him. The people of Fourth Street would not admit it, of course, but it was plain that they felt something akin to relief. Velvil Pflug was not cut out for physical work.

How long he might have continued his old way of life is a matter of conjecture. The chances are that he could have kept it up for a long time. The pace was not killing. There was nothing debilitating or wearying about his routine. He got out of bed in the late afternoon and breakfasted about five or six. Then he took up his station against the lamppost in front of Mrs. Gordon's candy stand on the Lewis Street corner. He chatted with, or at any rate directed his remarks at, all who passed, in a manner that was then considered more witty than insolent. By seven-thirty or eight most of his friends had brought their cruising taxicabs back to Fourth Street, had washed and eaten supper. and had

joined him in an admiring circle around the lamppost. For an hour or so, his heavy six o'clock breakfast digested, he settled down to the consumption of the five cent delicacy that was, on Fourth Street, the hallmark of idleness and the insignia of the loafer—the charlotte russe.

These circular slivers of cake buried under a mound of cheap whipped cream and mounted on a scaffolding of soggy pasteboard were not considered respectable. Nobody on the block ate them except Velvil Pflug and his corner associates. Mrs. Gordon was severely censured for stocking them. But they were a highly profitable item and the gang around the lamppost managed to dispose of an unusual number every night. The fact that a child who asked for one invariably received a box on the ear and a sharp warning against taking this first step toward becoming a corner loafer, a "charlotterussenik like Velvil Pflug," did not stop Mrs. Gordon from cramming her choice showcase with them, or Velvil and his gang from eating them nightly until nine or ten o'clock.

By that time they were ready to attend to the serious business of the evening. This consisted of "seeing what's doing" or, for those who were not interested in girls at the moment, paying a visit to the Honig poker game. Midnight or slightly later generally found the gang on its way to bed against the taxi-driving hours of the following day, which started at five or six. But midnight was tea time for Velvil Pflug. Only when the two solid lines of taxicabs would be pulling out of Fourth Street in the morning would Velvil be climbing into bed for the ten hours or more of sleep that he insisted were necessary for the maintenance of health. He maintained health so well that he might have been eating charlottes russe and irritating Fourth Street even now if fate had not taken a hand.

The Galician mind is not a particularly complex affair, but it has certain peculiarities. It takes no cognizance, for instance, of the word fate. Such generalizations may be all right with Litvaks, who are notoriously slipshod about their thinking. But on Fourth Street every event had to be traced to a cause or a series of causes that could be labeled. The fact that the labels very often meant nothing was unimportant.

On Fifth Street the rise of Velvil Pflug might have been attributed to fate. But on Fourth Street, in the short period between the end of his charlotte russe days and the time when he became so greatly respected that nobody would talk about his past, the reasons for his ascent to eminence were carefully catalogued. According to the block's keenest analysts, they were three: first, the sudden cessation of his mysterious income; second, the inexplicable intricacies of the feminine mind; and third, the untimely demise of Fourth Street's most revered resident.

The first reason was probably the strongest. If anything could stop Velvil Pflug from boring a hole in the lamppost on the Lewis Street corner with his right shoulder, or if anything could eliminate the charlotte russe from his diet, it was a halt in the flow of his mysterious income. The cause of the halt, like its source, remained among the few unanswered questions on Fourth Street. As soon as the block noticed a touch of irritability in his usually affable manner,

and a slight dullness in the knife-like crease of his trousers, the word began to spread that Velvil Pflug would soon have to go to work for a living, like other men. In more radical circles the remote possibility that he might soon remove his Litvak taint from Fourth Street altogether was puffed up to a distinct probability.

Both groups were wrong. Perhaps they were short-sighted, too. But this is a moot point. It must have been a little difficult to see the connection between the stopping of Velvil Pflug's income and Rivve Schumansky.

Rivve Schumansky's claims to distinction on Fourth Street were two. She was the only daughter of one of the wealthier men on the block, the proprietor of the chicken store on the Avenue D corner. And, though she was only nineteen, she had already refused so many eligible suitors that even Mr. Tannenbaum had lost count. This was a new experience for Fourth Street. Usually it was the other way around. But Rivve's dowry was so large, and the fact that whoever married her would some day inherit her father's profitable business was so definite, that she could afford to be fussy. She made it plain that she demanded more than mere eligibility. She wanted a man with something unusual to offer, something that would compensate, in some measure, for the size of her dowry and the potentiality of her father's business. She wouldn't, perhaps couldn't, state precisely what this thing was. But she insisted she would recognize it when it was offered.

"She wants an angel with four wings and a satchel ten-dollar bills," was the way Mr. Tannenbaum put it. He was addressing the people on the bench in front of Mrs. Gordon's stand, where Rivve Schumansky's rigid matrimonial standards had been the chief nightly topic of gossip for some months. For a marriage broker, Mr. Tannenbaum's voice was remarkably free from acrimony. The fact was that he didn't mind Rivve's independent attitude. Secretly, he liked it. She was pretty enough, and financially she was sound enough, for him to realize that ultimately she would have to be married off and that he would get his commission. In the meantime, the few hours that she spent in his front parlor every night were an excellent advertisement for him. She attracted the admiring attention of all his visitors. She gave his place the touch of romance that it had always lacked. And she kept the general subject of matrimony where Mr. Tannenbaum preferred it to be, namely, on everybody's lips.

Then an event occurred that drove both Rivve Schumansky and the vanishing crease in Velvil Pflug's trousers into the background. Idle, if spirited, gossip gave way before serious discussions that attempted to solve the deepest problem the block had ever faced.

Fourth Street's most revered resident was the Melitzer Rabbi. In a combined burst of prosperity and nationalistic loyalty he had been imported from Galicia right after the War at considerable cost to the block. He turned out to be an unprofitable investment. He had been leading the Fourth Street congregation for less than six months when, very quietly but very definitely, he died. In death he proved to be a greater problem than in life. Alive, it had simply been a matter of raising enough money to bring him over. The problem of

sending his body back to Galicia, however, could not be solved by money alone. Just as it was inconceivable that the Galician man of God should be buried in America, so it was out of the question that his body be shipped back like so much baggage. Money was difficult enough to raise. But to find the custodians willing to deliver a corpse three thousand miles away was apparently an impossibility. The fund for paying the expenses of two escorts was raised quickly. But the escorts themselves were not forthcoming. Nobody on the block wanted the job.

For several days, while the undertaker's bill mounted, every ounce of available brain power on Fourth Street worked at top speed. Mr. Tannenbaum, as usual, assumed active leadership of the campaign. He scurried about, cajoling, arguing, even threatening. But not a person on the block, male or female, married or single, could be found for the task. The group that gathered at night on Mrs. Gordon's bench to wait for Mr. Tannenbaum's daily report of progress grew silent and agitated as the days rolled by. Unless a volunteer came forward soon, the body of the rabbi would have to be interred in Brooklyn. It was a horrible alternative. The people of Fourth Street could almost see the sneers of the Fifth Street Litvaks, could almost hear their jeers at this self-inflicted slight to Galician honor.

Then one night, Mr. Tannenbaum came trotting up, his silver-headed cane twirling, his face wreathed in a complacent smile.

"It's all taken care of," he announced. The self-satisfaction in his voice was excusable. "I got somebody to go with the rabbi!"

"Who, Mr. Tannenbaum, who? Who is it?"

A dozen voices shouted the question eagerly. But Mr. Tannenbaum's instinct for the dramatic and a direct reply were mutually exclusive.

"Guess!" he said.

The dozen voices rose in a chorus of protests. Two dozen hands clutched at the marriage broker. He stepped skilfully out of range and smiled.

"Velvil Pflug!" he said.

The silence that followed was so sudden and so intense that Mrs. Gordon looked up, startled, from the soda she was mixing for a customer in the candy stand.

"Velvil Pflug?"

Mr. Tannenbaum smiled into the shocked faces and nodded.

"When is he leaving?"

The marriage broker's smile spread out into a gleeful grin.

"Right after his wedding," he said.

At that moment Fourth Street seemed to be in imminent danger of apoplexy.

"What? Velvil Pflug is getting married?"

"That charlotterussenik married?"

"Who is he marrying, who?"

Mr. Tannenbaum flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the sleeve of his black alpaca coat.

"Rivve Schumansky," he said.

The people on the bench could greet this, the most astounding news of all, with nothing but sagging jaws and bewildered glances. But their thoughts were clear on their faces. In half a minute they had seen the block's champion loafer, a penniless good-for-nothing, take on the great but distasteful task of delivering the Melitzer Rabbi's body to Galicia, win the most coveted hand on Fourth Street in matrimony, and become the crown prince of the wealthy Schumansky chicken business. They knew what this would mean for those who had been outspokenly critical of Velvil's idleness. It was breathtaking and terrifying and unreal. Certainly it wasn't funny. But Mr. Tannenbaum seemed to think so. He was smiling broadly at the thunderstruck people on the bench.

"How did he—how did he get her?"

The petrified tongues loosened.

"What did he give her she should take him?"

"What has Velvil Pflug got for Rivve Schumansky she should take him instead all the others?"

"Mr. Tannenbaum, tell us, what could Velvil Pflug give her that all the others, they couldn't?"

The marriage broker was a shrewd man who loved a neat piece of business even when it was perpetrated by a suspected Litvak. And anyway, his commission was guaranteed, regardless of what choice Rivve Schumansky made in husbands. He glanced carefully into the faces before him and made a visible effort to control his amusement. He smiled sardonically.

"There was nothing to it," he said with a shrug. "Velvil promised her a round trip to Europe for their honeymoon."

RICHARD ALDINGTON:

Amateur Painters

Now that two enormous explosions within a quarter of a century have destroyed the playground of Europe, I find myself thinking of it with a certain tenderness. Now that it is dead, it acquires the spurious charm of period pieces. And for some reason I can't explain, that vanished age of play from Waterloo to Munich is at the moment symbolized by the amateur painters, two of whom, Hitler and Churchill, have attained a dangerous eminence in other fields.

Since the little but damaging war of 1914-18, most painters have been amateurs. They had to be, for the sad and simple reason that there weren't enough collectors to go round. For every known collector there must be at least a thousand painters. I imagine that a genuine collector with genuine money to spend must be forced to go about in disguise when he visits the haunts of his hungry beneficiaries. If he let his identity be known, he would be in a worse position than the piper of Hamelin—he would be the head of a procession and have to pay for it into the bargain.

But the amateur painters I am thinking of are dead, or ought to be. They must not be confused with the large but vanished band of hedonists who swarmed over Montparnasse and Montmartre, hired studios, lived in cafes and night clubs, and occasionally produced a canvas because "Art" was the passport to a life virtually uninhibited by bourgeois conventions and laws. These were so numerous that their production *en masse* was enormous, and long ago turned the Salon des Independants into a vast uncongenial morgue.

No, the amateurs I am thinking of were modest people who never hoped to exhibit or had long given up that pleasing dream; virtuous people who never imagined that painting might be the camouflage for a life of inexpensive debauchery; gentle wistful creatures, who painted because they liked it, because painting was as much part of their lives as motoring is to their successors.

First, and rather high among this multitude of unknown amateurs, I must rank the mob of English ladies who sketched with ease, between about 1830 and 1880. My impression is that about 1880 they abandoned their tradition of delicate niggling water-colors for the easier flashy effects of oils. In that half-century the leisured English seem to have been very sketch-conscious. The "Picturesque Tours" and "Picturesque Guides" of the period were illustrated with romantic engravings of high technical skill, copied from the sketches of artists as famous as Turner. The amateurs formed their taste on these. But they are often so competent in an uninspired way that they must have had competent teachers. The ordinary guides of the period, such as Murray's Handbooks, contain practical hints on sketching, and advise their "fair readers" on the best points for making sketches of Lake Leman and Vesuvius.

The works of these dear dead ladies may not be studied in public galleries

or the big dealers. You must poke into the antique shops of provincial English towns, and there you might find them, in tarnished gold frames, generally with optimistic attributions to known performers. An even better field is to be found in the smaller bedrooms of old country houses and the drawing-rooms of rather impoverished "gentry" who have not moved with the times.

There, if one is patient, fragments of tradition may be picked up about the water-colors and the "fair painters." Those vast lakes and tremendous mountains so artistically fuming with mist suggesting a magnified Switzerland, turn out to be memorials of great-great-aunt Letitia's tour of the English Lake district in 1843. What an imagination dear Aunt Letitia possessed! And that expanse of Mediterranean sea and coast, so bafflingly familiar and yet so impossible to identify—it turns out to be a nook of Lake Maggiore seen through the same romantic eyes.

That water-color (you learn from the very old lady by the hearth) was made when Aunt Letitia and Cousins Fanny, Sarah, and Frederick, made the grand tour, chaperoned by the Prebendary who had once dined with Lord Byron's intimate friend, Mr. Hobhouse. The Prebendary, who frequently regaled the ladies with the anecdote, always said that although Mr. Hobhouse was a gentleman and indeed subsequently became a peer, he (the Prebendary) could not restrain a shudder at the thought of coming so near to Satan. But among themselves the young ladies—they were of course reading *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*—could never agree to this, and even remarked that it really looked as if the dear Prebendary were a little *narrow*.

Great-Aunt Letitia belonged to that school of romantic vision which saw everything as grandiose. But there was another, equally romantic school, which saw the world in picturesque miniature. You have to peer close up to their tiny colored vignettes to see the painstaking hair-line detail. That very picturesque church spire, obviously somewhere in northern France, is barely half an inch high, and yet every pointed aperture and crocket are faithfully recorded. That bay of Naples, including Vesuvius and Capri, could be covered by a couple of postage stamps. The inevitable view of the old Customs and Guard house on the frontier of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Italy (it is still there) is so small that you need a magnifying glass to see how accurate is the costume of the equally inevitable peasant woman with a bundle on her head. Those views of St. Peter's dome as seen from the campagna are romantic accuracy itself, though the exotic vegetation in the foreground has now unhappily vanished.

It is even possible to find one or two of these early works in old-fashioned pensions, like the one at Cava dei Terreni. But those melancholy reminders of departed generations of tourists chiefly display the oil paintings of a later epoch. Judging by the trail of mediocre pictures they left behind them, there must still have been a lot of picturesque tourists in the eighties and nineties. I don't for a moment believe in the common theory that they were left behind to settle unpaid bills. No one in his senses would have accepted such works in payment of anything, not even a tip. They were left behind for other motives. Perhaps the artist frankly recognized one of her rare failures; perhaps the

size of the canvas was inconvenient for future travel; or perhaps she even hoped that if it was hung in the pension Mr. Ruskin or young Mr. Wilde might see it, and proclaim its genius to the world in purple prose.

But the ever hopeful amateurs are indicated even in the motifs they chose. Twenty miles of rocky wooded coast with half a dozen promontories, several sea-gulls, and a fishing boat, are a favorite theme. Or they boldly tackle half a medieval town and the surrounding landscape of olive gardens, vineyards, and distant mountains, as seen from an upper window of the pension—so much nicer to paint from one's bedroom, dear, than surrounded by those dreadfully ill-bred foreign children.

I refuse the status of "amateur" to the pictures which hang in modern French cafes and restaurants. They have been put there for people to be forced to look at them; and they are often labelled with absurdly high prices, fifty or sixty francs, which is low commercialism and avidity.

What I like about the real amateurs is less their achievement than their intention. What tranquil contemplative lives, what a peaceful epoch of superbly useless labor! How free from guile and worry, from disordered ambition, from totalitarian vulgarity! Their modest incomes were unthreatened by social upheavals and wars. Their days glided peacefully by in the search for and recording of the romantically picturesque. The sun which so tranquilly they saw set at night was certain to rise on the same tranquillity next morning. They could even make plans, and be sure they would not be shattered by some public calamity. Even the Great and Good Queen was careful not to die until the outbreak of the unhappy twentieth century.

They could positively book rooms for next season, and actually come back and find everything as it had been. Quiet happy souls, had they but known their happiness. Did they? Probably they worried because British Consols fell half a point or because the Zulus were threatening the Empire. Yet they contrived to keep even such real troubles as these out of their serene art. Not one of them went mad and cut off a shell-like ear in frenzy. They made no history, but then history was never thrust upon them. Anglican Epicureans, pretty parasites, they painted all Europe *couleur de rose,* until they married the handsome young man with the wonderful whiskers and the Zingari tie. And then of course their troubles began. Peace to the ashes of Great-Aunt Letitia. She had the seeing eye.

WALLACE STEVENS:

Landscape with Boat

An anti-master-man, floribund ascetic.

He brushed away the thunder, then the clouds,
Then the colossal illusion of heaven. Yet still
The sky was blue. He wanted imperceptible air.
He wanted to see. He wanted the eye to see
And not be touched by blue. He wanted to know,
A naked man who regarded himself in the glass
Of air, who looked for the world beneath the blue,
Without blue, without any turquoise tint or phase,
Any azure under-side or after-color. Nabob
Of bones, he rejected, he denied, to arrive
At the neutral centre. The ominous element,
The single-colored, colorless, primitive.

It was not as if the truth lay where he thought,
Like a phantom, in an uncreated night.
It was easier to think i tlay there. If
It was nowhere else, it was there and because
It was nowhere else, its place had to be supposed,
Itself had to be supposed, a thing supposed
In a place supposed, a thing that he reached
In a place that he reached, by rejecting what he saw
And denying what he heard. He would arrive.
He had only not to live, to walk in the dark,
To be projected by one void into
Another.

It was his nature to suppose,
To receive what others had supposed, without
Accepting. He received what he denied.
But as truth to be accepted, he supposed
A truth beyond all truths.

He never supposed
That he might be truth, himself, or part of it,
And that the things that he rejected, part,
And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible blue
Grown denser, part, the eyes so touched, so played

Upon by clouds, the ear so magnified
By thunder, parts, and all these things together,
Parts, and more things, parts. He never supposed divine
Things might not look divine, nor that if nothing
Was divine then all things were, the world itself,
And that if nothing was the truth, then all
Things were the truth, the world itself was the truth.

Had he been better able to suppose:
He might sit on a sofa on a balcony
Above the Mediterranean, emerald
Becoming emeralds. He might watch the palms
Flap green ears in the heat. He might observe
A yellow wine and follow a steamer's track
And say, "The thing I hum appears to be
The rhythm of this celestial pantomime."

On the Adequacy of Landscape

The little owl flew through the night,
As if the people in the air
Were frightened and he frightened them,
By being there,

The people that turned off and came
To avoid the bright, discursive wings,
To avoid the hap-hallow hallow-ho
Of central things,

Nor in their empty hearts to feel
The blood-red redness of the sun,
To shrink to an insensible,
Small oblivion,

Beyond the keenest diamond day
Of people sensible to pain,
Whom cocks wake, clawing at their beds
To be again,

And who, for that, turn toward the cocks
And toward the start of day and trees
And light behind the body of night
And sun, as if these

Were what they are, the sharpest sun:
The sharpest self, the sensible range,
The extent of what they are, the strength
That they exchange,

So that he that suffers most desires
The red bird most and the strongest sky—
Not the people in the air that hear
The little owl fly.

LINCOLN FITZELL:

Streamlined

The highways spin us and we whirr
Past tractors plowing grit afield.
Metallic odors fan us, blur
The world in travel's wiped windshield.

Our god is power, steel, and fume
(In traffic with a Calf of Gold),
A trinity complete as doom,
And sparked by plugs electric-souled.

We race for vision, desert-far,
Where cactus decorates the sand.
The earth is scenic, sun and star,
Astronomy above the land.

We miss the awkward gaze of cows,
The bird that sings in river-view.
Though willow-creeks are branched with vows,
They green no word that rustles through.

For we are blank determinists,
Who purr and pass, an engine swarm,
With neither lightning in our fists,
Nor love to keep the journey warm.

WILLIAM MARCH:

The Marriage of the Bishops

On this particular morning, it seemed to the Bishop of the Wittins as if a series of unpleasant events had come, one after the other, for the sole purpose of upsetting him. In the first place, it was the day when he, as spiritual head of his country, began his annual pilgrimage to the mountains to re-enact, with the cooperation of the Bishop of the Bretts, the ceremony which had bound their two nations together in peace for so many generations.

The procedure of the ceremony was as complex as it was solemn: At a certain hour, amid chants and the tolling of bells, the Bishop of the Wittins, dressed in full regalia and riding a black mule, started up the side of the mountain which marked the boundary between his country and the country of the Bretts; and at the same time, the Bishop of the Bretts, under identical conditions, but riding on a white mule, began the pilgrimage from his side of the mountain; and when the two bishops met at the top, as they inevitably must, they went through an elaborate, symbolic marriage, a ceremony which the virile, blustering Bishop of the Wittins had always, in his secret heart, considered childish and in bad taste.

The ceremony itself was distasteful enough, in all conscience, thought the Bishop of the Wittins with considerable bitterness, but as if this were not enough, he had known since he got out of bed that morning that it would surely snow and turn cold before the ritual could be concluded and he could return to his comfortable house.

The good bishop, thinking these things, and examining himself in his full-length mirror to see that his robes hung properly, spoke his thoughts out loud to his valet, and the latter, from long habit, made a soft, sympathetic sound with his lips; but in his heart he knew it was neither the ceremony itself, nor the imminence of snow, which had upset his master. The real reason was that on this day he must meet the Bishop of the Bretts face to face, and remain for several hours in his company, and the Bishop of the Bretts, as everybody knew, was the human being whom the Bishop of the Wittins disliked above all others.

At that moment there came a vague, murmuring sound from the courtyard, and the valet, at his master's order, went to investigate. He returned with the one piece of information capable of putting the Bishop in even a worse state of mind than he was at the moment. The valet made his voice as soothing as possible, knowing the character and the opinions of his master so well: "The courtyard is full of petitioners again. They implore you to grant them divorces from their husbands and wives. They say they're desperate, and can't continue to live the way they are any longer."

The reaction which the valet had expected came quickly. It was the last straw, really, coming as it did on this disastrous morning, for divorce was one

of the things about which the Bishop of Wittins felt strongly. The idea shocked him, as it always did, and it violated one of the basic theories on which he rested the elaborate structure of his faith. But he suppressed his anger, and when he appeared on the balcony to receive his petitioners, he seemed entirely calm.

"Tell me," he began with deceptive gentleness, "why you want to be released from your marriage vows. Have your mates profaned your marriage beds?"

The petitioners shook their heads, but remained silent. "Come! Come," said the Bishop with false joviality. "Speak up! Don't hesitate to confess the cruel wrongs you have suffered!" Then, since nobody answered, he pointed to one of the petitioners and continued: "Tell me, my child, why you want a divorce from your wife. What wrong has the monster done you?"

The man looked down and shifted his feet. "I just don't *like* her, that's all," he said after a moment, "and I don't see why I must spend my life with somebody I don't like when you could easily grant me a divorce, if you wanted to."

"Oh-o-o-o, so you don't like her?" repeated the Bishop with a spurious gentleness. "But give us more details so that we, with our more backward perceptions, can understand the situation better."

"It's the way she chews meat," said the petitioner stubbornly. "It's the way she coughs without covering her mouth, and the way she wipes her nose on her petticoat. It's the way she—"

But the petitioner got no further, for at that instant the Bishop of the Wittins reached the end of his endurance and exploded. Marriage was a solemn affair, he shouted, and all people had to do to turn it into a beautiful adventure was to bring a little ordinary intelligence and understanding to its problems. He was tired, he roared, of hearing a percentage of his flock, fortunately small, always whining and complaining about their fancied miseries. The face of the Bishop had turned an angry purple by this time, and he pounded on the railing with his fist. No, he shouted in conclusion. No, he would not grant the divorces . . .

Then, having expressed his opinions and having lashed his petitioners with irony and contempt, he turned back into his apartment. A moment later the bells began to ring, and the Bishop, astride his black mule, dismissed the petitioners and their affairs from his mind with trained efficiency. It seemed to him, at times, as if his flock created these problems for themselves for the deliberate purpose of upsetting the routine of his life . . .

Occasionally he looked up and calculated the possibility of snow, but mostly he thought of the Bishop of Bretts, who, even now, approached the meeting place, from the other side of the mountain, with the relentlessness of death itself. The Bishop sighed and raised his hands. It would seem, he thought, that his colleague would realize, by this time, how objectionable he was to others, and would keep more to himself; but, perversely, the latter had taken a strong fancy to the Wittin bishop, and overwhelmed him with attention when occasions, such as the present, necessitated their meeting.

It was at this point that it began to snow, not gently as might have been expected at this season of the year, but in masses so thick and blinding that the mountainside was soon blotted out completely. After awhile, the guides decided that it would be too dangerous for the Bishop to proceed further, so they escorted him to a cabin, high up on the top of a crag, for safety. They built him a fire, assured him that the journey would be resumed as soon as it was safe, and left him.

The Bishop was not entirely displeased with this turn of events. Even if he were forced to spend the night in this cabin, his communicants would make him comfortable, and supply him with food, fare, and drink; and besides that, he counted any circumstance which delayed his meeting with the Bishop of the Bretts a benign one. He had almost dried his robes, and was wondering idly how his fellow bishop was faring in the storm, when the door opened, and, to his dismay, he saw that the guides who had led him to safety had felt it their duty to rescue the Bishop of the Bretts as well.

The latter was one of those men with high, irritating voices and creased, parchment-like faces which looked as if they had never been shaved. He managed, somehow, in speech, gesture, and emotions to caricature all the disagreeable qualities of women, without possessing any of their virtues. It almost seemed, or so thought the Bishop of the Wittins, that his colleague had been especially created by nature to be a mirror in which the desirable image of woman was, by distortion, made unbearable.

The Bishop of the Bretts came into the cabin half-frozen but chattering in his high, irritating voice. "Well! Well!" he said over and over. "This is a happy surprise, isn't it?" Then, still amiable, he moved the drying clothes of his fellow and seated himself squarely in front of the fire, cracking his knuckles slowly.

The Bishop of the Wittins got up in alarm and moved toward the door. For an instant, he considered the possibility of running for it, but when he saw how blindingly the snow fell, he was forced to change his mind. He raised his eyes quickly and stared at the guides, wondering whether they had smiled knowingly at one another, or whether the expression about their lips was only a trick of firelight and shadow.

"I can probably stand it for one night," muttered the Wittin bishop under his breath. "I'll say my prayers over and over, and not listen to what he says. I just won't let him annoy me, that's all!" He went to sleep somewhat reassured, but the next morning, when the two bishops awoke, the chief guide was outside with the news that the snow had, in the night, blocked all the trails and obliterated the pass. There was no hope for it: The Bishop of the Wittins and the Bishop of the Bretts were snowed in snugly for the winter.

When the significance of the news dawned finally on the Bishop of the Wittins, he began to storm angrily, but nothing he said made any impression on the guide. "It's the will of heaven," he said, sighing and rolling his eyes upward. "We must not question divine providence."

"I won't stay here another minute!" said the angry Wittin. "You can

easily make a litter and carry me across the ridge."

"Relax more!" sang out the Bishop of the Bretts. "What are you making such a fuss about?" He came to the cabin door and stuck his head out. "For my part, I think it's fine we're snowed in. Think of all the heart to heart talks we can have this winter."

"A litter would be too risky," said the chief guide. "Something might go wrong." He turned for confirmation to his companions, who had now joined him, and again the Bishop of the Wittins had a feeling that they had smiled slyly at one another, and that they would shout with laughter over his predicament once they were out of earshot.

So, mustering what dignity he could, he lifted his robes and walked back into the cabin, entering just in time to see the Bishop of the Bretts settle himself so that his bulk completely blocked the fire. "What were you doing outside with the guides?" he asked suspiciously, cracking his knuckles, one after the other, with a slow, maddening sound. But the Bishop of the Wittins did not bother to answer. He merely shook his head, sat down on his couch and stared at the wall, a hunted look in his eyes.

"Relax more!" called out the cheerful Brett bishop. "What you need is someone like me to take you in hand, and make you *relax* more!"

"I can't stand this for an entire winter," muttered the Bishop of the Wittins. "I know, now, I'll never live that long . . . I doubt, even, if I live through the night."

But his fear did not come true, of course, for several days later, when the guides brought food and fuel, the Wittin met them outside, and stood with them in the snow. He spoke again of the litter, but seeing the uncompromising faces of the guides, he abandoned his dignity all at once and began to talk in a wheedling voice. He explained, then, how he felt about the other bishop, and why it was impossible for him to remain in his company another instant. "You see," he concluded. "I'll go crazy if I remain here. I feel it coming on, hour by hour. If you don't make a litter and take me away from the Bishop of the Bretts, I'll go stark, raving crazy!"

"A litter would be too dangerous," insisted the head guide, and then added: "Pardon my presumption for contradicting a man so much more experienced than I can ever hope to be, but you can take my word that you won't go crazy. You'll imagine you're going crazy, and the time will even come when you don't much care if you do. But you won't." He raised his head and looked into the eyes of the Bishop of the Wittins. "I know what I'm talking about," he said gently, "because the Bishop of the Bretts is just like my wife, and I've lived with her for the past fifteen years."

"I might be able to stand him," continued the Bishop in an uncertain voice, "if he wouldn't crack his knuckles so much." But he spoke to himself, this time, and not to the insensitive guides. Then he turned away and went back into the cabin. A moment later the guides saw his face pressed flat against the window. It seemed to them, for the next few days, that he never left it, for each morning when they came with food and supplies, they saw

him there staring at the ridge, his lips moving as if he prayed that the snows would miraculously melt, and release him.

But it was at the end of the second week that he flung open the door, at the approach of the guides, and ran to meet them. "Get me out of here!" he implored. "I can't stand him a minute longer! Get me away from here!"

"Why do you dislike the Bishop of the Bretts so much?" asked the chief guide.. "Has he ever done you a wrong?"

"It's the way he talks all the time," said the Bishop of the Wittins. — "Talk! Talk! Talk! without ever stopping to take a breath! — There's nothing you can mention that he doesn't know all about! — It's the way he cracks his knuckles. — It's the way he blocks the fire, and scratches his fat back against the mantelpiece . . . "

The distraught Bishop flung out his arms. "Why in the name of common sense should I spend a whole winter with a person I dislike?" he shouted, "when you could, if you really wanted to, make a litter and carry me down the mountains?" He stopped suddenly and his mouth opened in surprise, as if his words had brought another scene into his consciousness. After a moment he spoke directly to the guide whose wife was so like the Bishop of the Bretts.

"I remember you, now," he began. "You're one of the men who petitioned me for a divorce."

"Yes, Your Reverence."

"What did I tell you?"

"You said no. You said all I needed to make life a beautiful, happy adventure once more was to use a little patience and understanding."

The Bishop's face twisted up. "Please . . . Please!" he said.

At that moment the Bishop of the Bretts came outside, waddled over, and pulled his companion's sleeve. "Relax more!" he said. "Just relax! — That's all you need!"

The Bishop of the Wittins flinched, closed his eyes and shuddered slowly, and after a pause he spoke again to the guide. "What else did I say to you that morning?" he asked.

"You said you didn't have any respect for a man who rebelled against the necessity of living his whole life through with the person he disliked the most."

"You'll catch cold if you stay out here," said the Bishop of the Bretts. "The trouble with you is, you never pay any attention to what others tell you for your own good." He raised his eyebrows in a maddening, superior manner, and then, slowly, with the sound of small bones grinding against one another, he cracked his ten knuckles, one by one.

There was a short silence and then the Bishop of the Wittins, without warning, raised his arms, screamed with rage and frustration and fell back into the implacable arms of the Bishop of the Bretts, his face and neck turning a rich, weathered purple.

"That's right! Relax more!" said the Bishop of the Bretts in his cheerful, irritating voice. "Just relax more! . . . That's all you need!"

SELDEN RODMAN:

Langley's Folly *

" . . . the results were so discordant that Professor Langley undertook a new series of measurements, the result of which forms the basis of his celebrated . . . "

Read all about it! Get your copy of The Post! Read how
AERODROME DID A FLOP HOW PROFESSOR MANLY GOT DUCKED
Any boy could have skimmed an oyster-shell further . . .
The buzzard is a bust; that is all there is about it.

That was all there was about Professor S. P. Langley
As he stood that afternoon with Mr. A. G. Bell
On the deck of the houseboat in the Potomac
Watching the tangled guy-wires upset the plane and spill
Mr. Manly, the government's $50,000, the hopes of twenty years
And the salvation of a scholar into the water's lap.
The public was delighted. What does the public, he thought, care
If Dr. Langley draws sun-spots, determines the temperature of the moon,
Invents the spectro-balometer, by whose heat-curves the eye can trail
The passage of spiral nebulae, read magnitudes baffling the brain?—
The public, he thinks, wants to see man fly—
But better than that, it wants to see him fail.

When all was ready, Mr. Manly nodded to a helper who fired
A skyrocket, warning the battery of photographers: GET SET . . . GO!
There was roaring, grinding noise
And from the houseboat toward the river sixty feet below
It simply slid into the water
Like a handful of mortar . . .

But it could have flown! he says over and over, it could have flown;
It had everything but the method of launching necessary to flight;
Did I fail to wait because afraid to be one among the rank?
Will that fame for which I risked so much consider everything I did,
My whirling-tables, measuremnts of bird in flight, an old man's prank?
My God, why have I cared this much . . . despising and yet caring . . . they will
say

* Excerpt from Part III of THE AIRMEN, a narrative poem in four parts based on the history of flight.

This is the scholar who tried to act, the professor who wanted to be a man,
Who, instead of being remembered as the inventor of the first machine that flew,
Will go down the ages as a crank . . .

As for the rest of the Smithsonian staff, the stuffers
Of birds and rabbits, who have nothing to do with airships, they see
Through field-glasses and a telescope specially mounted on a tower
The debacle of "Langley's Folly" . . . .

And the testers of teeth and of crank splines know nothing of airships,
The dusters of diaphragms, the welders of bailwire know nothing,
Nor the nameless inspectors whose eyes under mercury lamps
Check breathers; nor designers at drafting-boards; the regular trips
All forgotten, only the crossing of continents is remembered;
Not the movers but the shakers; not the dreams but the dates touch the lips,
Nor the date of that trial on the premature eighth of December
Nineteen Hundred and Three.

LOUIS FILLER:

An American Odyssey: the Story of Susan Lenox

For several years after the assassination of David Graham Phillips in January, 1911, talk persisted concerning an enormous novel he was known to have left unpublished. Phillips' reputation, as Upton Sinclair wrote bitterly, had already been put in his grave; and no wonder. Although his earlier, experimental fiction had been approved, Phillips had, in 1906, set himself outside the pale of respectable literature with his epochal blast against the major political parties. His "Treason of the Senate" series had given *Cosmopolitan* half a million readers. It had set in motion the public demand which finally brought about the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, providing for direct election of senators. Month after month, for close upon a year, he had voiced such truths as would in any other time have closed the writing field to him. As it was, "The Treason of the Senate" was never reprinted in book form. It was fortunate for Phillips that popular interest in reform was higher than it had ever been before in American history.

But from that time on, Phillips was a marked man. It was recognized that he had guided the currents of contemporary writing. His later fiction had sold in the tens and even hundreds of thousands of copies, and roused controversy on many scores. Yet criticism had developed a studied and deliberate contempt for his writings and ideas that was entirely individual. And once he was removed from the scene, once the great muckraking movement which had fostered him was destroyed, literary circles wrote him off their books.

Nevertheless, there was his unpublished novel. Some critics assumed that it was one of those which had already been issued posthumously—*The Grain of Dust,* perhaps, or *The Price She Paid. Bookman,* however, which was better informed, called Phillips' publishers a number of times to ask about the novel which Phillips had worked over for more than seven years and which had been ready for release only several weeks before his death. *Susan,* he had thought of calling it, or possibly *A Girl of the Streets.* He had gone over its 400,000 words four times in pencil, and had given up revising it with the reluctance of a man who hardly knows whether he can give it more or not. It baffled his powers of self-criticism, he said.

At last, in June of 1915, it began in *Hearst's Magazine—Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*—and the editors streamed above it the words, "America's Greatest novel." Criticism, which had so often borne with equanimity the appearance of greatest American novels, stiffened and prepared for battle. It was soon apparent that Phillips had left a book vibrating with sensation. It was impossible to procure additional copies of the magazine. Censorship made ready to take

steps against the forthcoming book as obscene; and when, after nineteen months of agitated serialization, *Susan Lenox* came to an end, it was issued in two volumes—whereupon the storm broke over it.

It was scarcely a battle. Calumny and derogation poured upon the book and its author from every side. There was hardly a good word for it anywhere. The Society for the Suppression of Vice had no difficulty in forcing its withdrawal. The entire first edition was ordered removed, and it disappeared from the stores, never again to be reissued in its original form.

"It would have been better for Mr. Phillips' reputation and the reputation of American letters if it had never been published," the New York *Times* commented. It helped not the slightest that Theodore Dreiser's "*Genius*" was laboring under a like obloquy, and being defended by well-known young men of wit and capability. The Boston *Transcript* called attention to the Robert W. Chambers preface to *Susan Lenox,* the keynote of which was Phillips' honesty of purpose: "Despite the attempts to prejudge Mr. Phillips' posthumous novel by frantic claims (*sic*) as to its high moral purpose and sincerity, it seems impossible for an unbiased reader of fiction to view it otherwise than as an extremely offensive addition to the literature of pornography." *The New Republic* intellectuals talked of Phillips' "humorlessly romantic view of prostitution," and the New York *Sun* noted that Phillips was "not merely less selective than Flaubert; he is positively less selective than Arnold Bennett."

The campaign continued unabated, subsiding to a degree with the issuance of the expurgated edition. After that a kind of calm prevailed—such a calm as dictates that only the best need be spoken of the dead.

There had been a rage of books on sex and social disease back in 1912 and 1913. Outstanding among these had been the very capable *House of Bondage,* by Reginald Wright Kauffman. This novel clearly demonstrated the thesis of economic determinism in the making of prostitutes. Those who did not know the circumstances under which *Susan Lenox* had been written commented on Phillips' "uncanny" ability to foretell tastes in fiction. A few, however, knew that the germ of the story had been conceived early in the 1880's, when young Phillips had witnessed an unforgettable scene:

A young woman, no more than a girl, had been accused of having "fallen," something which in all innocence she did not understand. To blot away her shame, she had been forced to marry a backwoods lout. Graham had seen the girl sitting defenseless upon a wagon, waiting to be carried away to her new home. He had seen the rough husband to whom she had been assigned, and read the horror and tragedy upon her face. The blighting of so young a life by ignorance and cowardly pressure was something Phillips had never been able to forget. It had attained greater meaning as he grew older and better understood the role of women, condemned almost *en masse* to suffering as they readjusted themselves to changing conceptions of their role, and particularly so, as we shall see, in America. Phillips had learned the horror of statistics, which were able to foretell in advance what percentage of girls would become prostitutes. He had determined to make clear why prostitution occurred.

But it was not prostitution as such that was the theme of *Susan Lenox;* it was not even marriage. It was the basic influence of sex in the lives of men and women both—and, more specifically, the place of women in American society. Phillips had been a muckraker, but he had been first and foremost a novelist. He made inquiry into native customs and ideas involving sex as they were affecting his times, and being affected by them; and to do this, he was forced to question everything that had happened to the American way of life since he had first been able to observe those customs and ideas in operation.

Today, it is no longer unique for a woman to make a career in business or art, to be independent. Not so in Susan's time. The world from which she fled at the age of seventeen because she was unwanted, dominated American life. It combined a mystical reverence for women with harsh conventions that stifled their possibilities of growth. The world into which she ran, on the other hand, the open, anarchistic world, was founded on insecurity. And if it made no fetish of virtue in a woman, as Susan's family and community had done, it could even less afford her special consideration. She had to make her place in it as a man did, that is, expecting no quarter, and depending only upon herself.

But even while Susan was making her fight for independence, insecurity—a product of social and economic change—was beginning to attack such communities as the one which had rejected her. And as insecurity became more wide-spread and acute, even the most unthinking people were faced with the realization that respectability, which had so long united them and given them opportunities, *was no protection*; that they too must fight for their lives with whatever weapons came to hand. One result of this condition was the tremendous reform upheaval of the 1900's; it was less obvious that old fetishes of morality were becoming less potent, and were being frankly disavowed by a second generation, which had no stake in them. Youth, in the 1910's, went bohemian. Disillusioned in the Twenties, it inclined against all thought and considered itself emancipated. Later, coming to grips with depression, it turned radical, and believed that it had at last discovered freedom.

But neither of these successive, short-lived generations was quite so free as it thought. The burning requirements of sex, food, security, produced hasty conventions of various kinds and degrees—sometimes contradictory ones. Women could vote now and follow careers, but girls who hardly knew how long their jobs would last plotted desperately to marry safely; "free love" fell out of favor as impractical. Hence, where Susan's flight from respectable, if prejudiced surroundings had originally seemed to readers the height of looseness, in post-War times it began to look more like an arrogant, priggish, even impossible adventure. Those who read Joseph Hergesheimer's *Cytherea,* in the Twenties, and were excited by his vision of enticing femininity lolling in splendor on an emerald shell, saw little need for less sophisticated fiction. But in the Thirties they were more serious; some read Marx, and could criticize Susan for not having stayed in the box-factory into which chance had thrown her. Others, whose dewy youth had contained traces of promiscuity, now pointed out that

Susan had never contracted syphilis in her career as mistress and street-walker.

It would have been vain to remind her critics that many of the women who had, in earlier days, managed to make their way through prejudice and malevolence to success had run the danger of disease, pregnancy, defenseless loneliness. It would have been just as vain to point out that a ruling aspiration of those days had not been labor leadership. Those who understood Susan's flight did not sympathize with her ambitions, which were provokingly plain: to do useful work, and to be free to do whatever she liked. Those who allowed her this did not care for her manner, its old-fashioned idealism and honesty. Those who appreciated her manner did not understand her methods, which made even street-walking preferable to a secure if unsatisfactory relationship.

Susan Lenox, in a word, told too much; and the hectic years that followed the World War were years of great confusion. *Main Street* was clear; *Cytherea* was clear; *Jurgen,* with a little imagination of sorts, was reasonably clear. They were clear even in the Thirties, though they were not always read during those years. But *Susan Lenox,* in the 1065 pages of the original edition, was as turbulent as the era that had produced it. Let us underscore this: Theodore Dreiser's novels, for example, and his pre-War novels in particular, made no conjectures; they simply stated as a final, unquestionable fact, that the dreams and ideals of the nineteenth century were dead. *Susan Lenox* assumed that the old ideals had no more to offer, and instead plunged into a consideration of the issues the reforming 1900's had raised—into a thicket of situations involving economic freedom, moral attitudes, and business approaches. It did so confidently, certain that further reform would make its message of earnest individualism clear—and unaware that war was soon to discredit reform for two decades, and make the times that had engendered reform entirely unfamiliar to a new generation.

Those who later experienced Mencken and Floyd Dell, Van Wyck Brooks and Edmund Wilson, the phychologists and revolutionists, were necessarily wiser than Susan could ever be. But did they necessarily achieve as much? Susan, when she had emerged from the jungle of tragedy and desperation, had learned to live. As an actress, she would be real, substantial. She could remind the younger women and girls that their problems were not superior to hers for being different; that if their lives were in constant danger through catastrophes of sex and economic dilemma, she too had been near death; and that, finally, they must be strong in themselves, and in nothing else, since nothing could substitute for inner strength.

"Be strong," advised Burlingham, the man whose friendship started her in life, without whose first guiding instructions she might never have begun:

> "You'll find that you were right at first when you thought only the strong could afford to do right. And you'll see that you were right in the second stage when you thought only the strong could afford to do wrong. For you'll have learned that only the strong can afford to act at all, and that they can do right and wrong as they please *because they are strong.*"

It is a terrible thing when a man can foretell, as Burlingham could, Susan's

inevitable relationship to life. Those who have no imagination are not forced to dare greatly, are not required to feel the full impact of universe and society. They need not challenge them. Susan, who was not born of the desperate poor, with no respectability to lose, nor yet of the protected rich, who could ignore respectability, but of the middle-class, in a house founded *upon* respectability, came naturally into opposition with everything traditional in American life.

From the day Susan was born dead—and, being illegitimate, better dead—with her mother lying dead in the next room; from that day on which the doctor, hating to give up so perfect a little body, cleared space in the center of the room and whirled the small corpse round and round like an Indian club—round and round until the room was a blur before his throbbing eyes, round and yet round until the sweat streamed from his face, until the tiny figure cried out in protest, and lived—from that day until the day when womanhood presented itself as a special problem, Susan was unconsciously being prepared for the tragic life that awaited her.

She was a child; there was not much that could be done to a child who did not push herself into snobbish traps. She was healthy and self-sufficient. But she was illegitimate, and there would have to be a day of reckoning. Had she been less intelligent, less courageous, the social modes would soon have impressed upon her the stain of her inferior position. She might have found humble status in Sutherland, Indiana.

Susan, however, knew nothing of illegitimacy, could not conceive it or fight it. The events that made it clear to her that the aunt and uncle and cousin with whom she lived had no true love of her, taught her only that she could not live with malicious, cowardly, and, in any event, unsympathetic people. She did not yet know the significance of money; she did know the significance of character. And when she sat at last as the wretched child had sat whom Phillips had seen in his youth, on a wagon, waiting to be saved by marriage, Susan was face to face with the inescapable proximity of existence, the necessity for conquering it on pain of otherwise being conquered.

We can imagine what happened to that other Susan, condemned to mental and moral death at the hands of a man stronger than she was by reason of social approval. But Susan, after the nightmare, unforgettable scenes of her wedding night, ran away. Had she then known all the possibilities of hunger and drudgery and debasement that confronted her, she might have preferred to die, rather than to go on in the face of overwhelming odds. It was ignorance that saved her, as it has saved so many neophytes who will not believe the world can be the hideous prison it sometimes is.

Still they pursued, trying to find her, to return her to her lawfully wedded husband. Society was no passive thing; it was aggressive and determined—so much so that it was hardly worth attempting to escape its mandates. There was no tolerance; there was, apparently, no logic. Susan had quickly to supplement her courage with experience, or die.

Were it not for the helping hand which now and again thrusts out, sudden-

ly, even miraculously as it seems, there would be few people of high earnestness who would survive to do their work. Rodney Spencer met Susan before failure coarsened him, Burlingham long after failure had made him a philosopher. Without the intervention of such people, who either liked her for what she was, or helped her in order to help themselves, there would have been no Susan Lenox. They made her what she became.

Yet Susan was beautiful, even as were many fiction heroines. The fashion of a later realism became to paint the drab details of feminine imperfection—as though there were an intrinsic virtue in negative description. But Susan was beautiful not through the nebulous forgery of an unimaginative writer, but because Phillips with very real details portrayed her as beautiful. And her attractiveness did not lessen an iota the sufferings she was forced to endure. Frank Harris refused to believe this: Susan Lenox, he asserted, could not have walked a dozen feet down Broadway without being discovered. So much for Frank Harris! But, as Phillips knew, neither Susan's charms nor superior talents could substitute for experience—neither would sell themselves; she would have to learn to sell them. This was years and years before Hollywood demonstrated with palpable armies of "lovelies" desperately trying to earn a living, the blinding fact against which native optimism and romance had hypnotized American understanding. Susan's face and figure would not help her to live as she wanted to live. They would make more difficult her preservation of character. Her character would not help her—nobody wanted character. And kindness, honesty, talent—they were a glut on the market, they were not commercial.

And so Susan was never a street-walker in the sense of one who has been broken to a mean work. She was an artist, as bent upon an adjustment wherein she could express herself freely as Phillips himself had been, when, as a boy, he had gone into journalism to become capable and independent. Phillips, Frank Harris somewhat sourly observed, portrayed Susan as a sort of second-rate actress. But this was mere sex-antagonism on Harris's part. Harris had no wish to respect a woman who had conquered life upon its own terms, and could look upon him as an equal—and perhaps more. Susan, who had learned to use men as they had used her, was no prey for lechery. And so she must be second-rate.

But Susan was no more a second-rate actress than George Brent, the love of her life, was a second-rate dramatist. That is to say, Susan being a fictional creation, we cannot tell whether she was or was not—not casually, at least. It is true that her life did not show a budding and irresistible genius from early childhood, in the way of sentimental novels about "artists." But, on the other hand, Susan was a woman, and in America particularly, women who were really artists—not pleasant landscape painters, nor parlor singers—were peculiar phenomena.

A knowledge of the American stage in its historical phase, in brief, better suggests Susan's true place among American actresses than does Frank Harris's ill-natured observation. For the rest, it is clear that Susan brought to the stage—to look at the purely esthetic aspect, for a moment—an experience compounded of everything real.

It is worth noting that nothing like *Susan Lenox* had ever before appeared in the lists of American fiction, and that no effort was made to come to grips with the problems it posed. Europe had some books dealing with feminine success, either through opportunities offered by high birth, or through *or despite* the limits allowed women, that is, the passions. But ways had been well prepared for such women. There had been a Nell Gwyn, a Madame Pompadour, a Catherine, a Rachel—a history of more or less extraordinary women who had walked a tenuous road between courtesanship and respectability.

Susan Lenox had no such road prepared for her in America. A harlot was never more nor less than a harlot. Virtue was no social value to be bought or sold according to an adjustable scale: it was absolute. A woman possessed virtue or did not possess it. Susan, to whom her first commercial sex experience was only a desperate means of making money—not for herself, in fact, but for Burlingham, who lay dying in a charity hospital—did not understand this mandate which herded all women into one anonymous mass. She had to be taught that, having fallen, she was forever condemned, not only in ignorant eyes, but in eyes that were not ignorant, nor even unintelligent. She had to learn that she must make her own standards of right and wrong, must fight for them with all the energy she could muster, must look for understanding, encouragement, appreciation, first to herself.

There was nothing in American fiction like *Susan Lenox*. Tenement conditions, factory horrors, political corruption, virtue, vice, were seen for the first time, not through the eyes of a man, but through the eyes of a woman—a lady born, as so many people reminded her in the early stages of her adventures. Susan saw them as little and as much as she had to. She became no labor organizer, no social worker—and for the same reason that prevented intelligent and capable organizers and investigators from becoming actors and actresses Phillips' gallery of female portraits contained other women of highly individual and aspiring character; they were wives, journalists, businesswomen, and their adventures tell us much regarding the "woman question" which at all times so concerned Phillips. But it was with Susan Lenox, the most desperate and uncompromising of all these women, that Phillips was able to lay most bare the heart of contemporary society as he had found it.

And because Susan was open and honest, she was dangerous to associate with. Sensible, established people naturally avoided her. They recognized her only when she commanded their recognition, and was able to enforce the command. They were attracted to her only when she no longer needed them. She won her fight. Her victory added one more person to the few who could freely express honesty and individuality, and not be destroyed. Susan Lenoxes made the road for their successors—not easier, since nothing could substitute for experience—not easier, but more bright; that was what distinguished them.

There are no doubt readers today who still break up the story into sections punctuated by Susan's descents into prostitution. Such readers are far behind Phillips, who, once and for all, put it into its place in Susan's life. The crime of prostitution was not hers, but society's. Prostitution might have ruined her

morally and physically, but so might factory work have done that, or any of the other enchaining means of livelihood Susan encountered. None of them did; and if prostitution played an infinitely larger role in her career than did factory work, it was for only one reason: that the cesspool of injustice it represented reflected the weaknesses in the American social structure more glaringly than did a native economics with resources to squander. Susan aimed higher than she knew, in striving for mere freedom and independence; it was no wonder that she fell so far.

One thing the discerning reader misses in the austere pages: the failure of ecstasy in Susan's life. Through all the horrors which, as the critic of the Boston *Transcript* amazingly put it, "she deliberately sought," she had barely the opportunity to know joy as it can sometimes come, freely, consummately. There was no pagan in Susan; life was far too serious and difficult—it was impossible to forget that it depended absolutely on the possession and continuing possession of money. The daring that can make young life and love an adventure, the pure joy that can ignore fine clothes and position, that can take its chance with food and shelter—these things were missing completely from her life. And although she loved art fiercely, her love was not balanced by that lightness that results in healthy irreverence and experiment. Yet, in view of the fearful catastrophes which overtook the artistic movements of the Twenties and the Thirties both, is it still possible to say that the material considerations which motivated Phillips in his work were not rooted in earth?

If the novel took more than seven years to write, it took a quarter of a century to develop—that crucial quarter which determined the strength and national scope of the great pre-War reform era. Still the years continued to pour wonders upon each other. It is difficult to realize that *Susan Lenox* was published in 1917. One thinks, so long ago! and then, so recently! The Ohio, Indiana, and New York which Phillips portrayed have changed many times over. And yet, seen more closely, they are not, after all, unrecognizable. It is only that we have dropped them so entirely, and, in doing that, have cut ourselves free from a not-too-distant reality that might very well cast light on the present.

There are novels that have been the sensation of days, others that seem less dependent on current controversies and events. The past era, which was quite rich in novelists who were bitterly opposed and violently praised for reasons that had little to do with literary principles, suggests that more objective and informed critiques would aid understanding considerably. From the turn of the century to the present extends a modern line of writers who challenge criticism and organization. Among the many works these writers produced is *Susan Lenox,* not alone, as some critics would have it, but flanked by other product of Phillips' endeavor. Where does *Susan Lenox* stand among the others? It would be absurd to anticipate a larger opinion here, but it can at least be expected that *Susan Lenox* will no longer be given the old, ill-fitting comparison with *The Scarlet Letter.* There is time and need for illuminating criticism. So much is certain, however: that few novels were more completely American.

HOWARD NUTT:

The Intellectuals

I think we were followed here.
Perhaps we should change our whiskers.
Let's take a table near the door
And speak in whispers.

This is the sort of place
Where you don't go wising off;
You give the man your order
With a wink and a cough.
You know what's what, and that's enough.
You disagree, but don't get tough.

Suppose you should let slip—
You simply say, "Unquote"
(That woman with her back to us
Is taking notes).
Somebody softsays something;
Somebody overhears;
We tip our glasses in a toast;
Somebody . . . disappears.

It's almost tickety-tock.
Beware the cough of the clock.
You're on the spot and you'll get got;
You'd better be ready to duck!

Observe above the hat rack:
The management regrets
It cannot be responsible
For loss of life, or wits.

These may be humble people;
The place seems modest, too;
Though now you may even be bored,
Don't say I didn't say "Boo."
Nobody's going to shout
Look out —

Look out!

LOOK OUT!

Weary-Water Sue

A blue-blood blonde descends the stair,
Stands liquid-like before a mirror,
Dabbles the whirlpool of her hair,
Flows to a table, somersaults
The little hearts of cork and rubber
Upon her weary-water waltz;
Then pours herself into a chair
And ripples back her wrap, like froth,
And (without splashing on the cloth)
Congeals in exquisite despair.

It's rather hard
To be so bored
And O SO tired
And SO desired.

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG:

Home Again

These are the muscled men who walked along
The competent ruts of repeating seasons:
Jays creaking in winter, and guns crackling
Into coveys of quails, for reasons
That need no considering or
Gesturing of hands. Yet, a ledge
Raining silence upon them,
Skies rhyming clarity with dread,
Made them long ever for a fence
Guarding an elm, shading a shed.

Over ebony portals of yearning
Come salutes, thud final commandoes.
Time to go back, they murmur,
But coming home they'll see at the windows
No greeters, boon companions none,
Only an old woman retying her apron,
A spayed dog asleep, and their father's
Malacca cane leaning at the door.
In they must go for their utmost bread
And meat, and gravely die once more.

MEYER LEVIN:

The Married Man

Come five o'clock Thursday, Speedy would always ask Wittenberg for the loan of ten bucks.

"Hey sourpuss," he would yell from the next chair, as though Wittenberg were a block away, "lend me ten bucks till Satdy."

Speedy had such a joking voice, and his face was so light that a man would be a fool to get sore. If he called a man a sourpuss behind his back, that would be different.

Even if the shop were full of customers, rain or shine Speedy would come out with his yelp for ten bucks. Luckily, five o'clock Thursday was not usually busy.

"Fork up, fork up," he would demand, rubbing his thumb over his fingers. "Come on papa, pull out that roll, we know you got it!" He would wink at Tillie the manicure, at the other two barbers, and at Joe the shine.

The shine would grin till you would think all the teeth were going to fall out of his face.

What could a man do? Even if he were in the midst of lathering a customer, Wittenberg would have to set down his brush, wipe his fingers, reach into his rear pocket for his wallet, and give Speedy ten dollars.

Speedy would roll the money between his palms, kiss it goodbye, and tuck it carelessly into the pocket of his barber coat.

"What's this for, a new girl?" Wittenberg was supposed to ask.

"Mmm-mmm!" Speedy would lick his mouth and tap the floor with his natty little feet. His eyes would be talking to the shine as though only they, and not Wittenberg, could understand about a juicy woman.

"Well, be sure and get your money's worth," Wittenberg was supposed to say. Then he would return to work, his face carefully averted from Tillie, his heavy underlip stuck out, hanging loose as he labored with care.

In his head he never stopped thinking, what kind of a crazy fellow was Speedy. Sure he would pay back the money. First thing when they got their envelopes Saturday he always peeled off ten dollars and handed it to Wittenberg with a smirk that said, Ha you old miser you thought I wouldn't pay you, but here it is! Why couldn't Speedy catch up with himself one week, and not always be ten dollars short? If he didn't go out with a girl one week? Or if he made it cheaper? How could a man be like that, always ten dollars short?

Money burned Speedy's pockets. Plenty of times Wittenberg had seen him with a wad he had run up shooting craps. Overnight it would be gone. On Thursday he would have to ask for ten bucks, and on Friday he would get his meals on credit at Joe's wagon, paying off on Saturday.

As closing time came, the whole shop would be watching to see what kind of girl was coming to call for Speedy. He got all kinds, even nice girls sometime. Girls from the offices upstairs, girls from dance halls, lord only knew where he picked them all up. The nice ones would come into the shop for him with curiosity shining in their eyes, as if they were taking some kind of dare. Other times he would have cheap girls, with little gaps of underwear showing between their stretched skirt hooks.

"How was she, Speedy?" would be the thing to say the next morning, with a leer at Tillie, too, if she were listening.

"Okay, okay! want me to fix you up?" And no matter who Speedy was talking to, his face would always be grinning at Joe the shine, as if the two of them had a private joke.

Sometimes Wittenberg felt so sore at Speedy that he could smack him in the puss. In that smart-aleck pasty puss. Speedy with his shiny dancing feet and his fancy English pants that came up to his chest. What did a fellow like that get out of life? What was he after?

At other times, Wittenberg said to himself, "All right. That is his way of living. All he wants is a good time. He has a good time. What is wrong with that?"

Some days, he had to like Speedy. In the dull hours, Speedy was full of jokes. Dirty stories, always new, tumbled from him. The hottest ones, he'd say, he got from the girls. Tillie would amble by the group of men, and Speedy would bark after her, "We can't teach you nothing, baby, you know them all." Or else he would whisper very loud, for her benefit.

A man had to be one of the boys. Wittenberg would listen to the stories, and laugh his peculiar little laugh that was like a giggle. Speedy would pat him on the back, saying, "Old sourpuss. He ain't so dumb. I bet he knows a thing or two."

Wittenberg would feel himself leering.

Speedy would say, "We rub it in, but we're pals, huh sourpuss?"

"Sure. Sure."

This Saturday, just before five, the door opened and in walked one of Speedy's girls. It was Mamie; the fellows in the shop all knew her by sight.

"Hello sugar, I didn't have anything to do so I came in to wait," she said.

She sat down and made herself at home. She wasn't wearing stockings. Speedy said she never had on any underwear either.

This girl Mamie was one of the cheap-looking girls he had; a bag he called her. The face was caked with make-up like eggshell over her soft flesh, and her eyebrows were tweezed to a pencil line. Who would want such a girl as Mamie? Speedy could keep her.

Speedy was busy just then, but kept up chatter with his girl; they had the whole shop in stitches. Suddenly Speedy remembered, and yelled to Wittenberg, "Hey sourpuss, how about that ten bucks you owe me?"

Wittenberg was already reaching for the money, when the last words struck him. Why should that cheap fellow, who couldn't keep a nickel in his

pocket, make it seem as if he, Wittenberg, was the one who borrowed the money?

Before this cheap broad what did it matter? And Tillie knew who owed who. And yet Wittenberg felt his neck swelling against his collar.

"I need it tonight," Speedy sang out, and the girl pretended to pay no attention, choosing that moment to cross her legs, pull open her box, and monkey with her face.

Silently Wittenberg drew out his wallet, selected a bill, and handed it over. Speedy rolled it up, kissed it toward Mamie, winked, and stuck it in his pocket.

The next morning Speedy was generous with details. Wittenberg pretended not to listen. He had had enough from this cheap bum.

Speedy began to kid him. "Say, sourpuss, you know Mamie took a shine to you. Honest to god. All the time she kept asking me what does sourpuss do with himself. She says she bets you got hair on your back. And can she pull your hair—"

Wittenberg moved off.

Speedy remarked, almost directly to Tillie, "Well look at old sourpuss. He's sore at me. What's he sore about? . . . Listen, Witty, how about me fixing you up? How about a double date? You take Mame, and I'll take Tillie, huh?"

Tillie laughed.

Suddenly Wittenberg said something foolish. Even as the words came out of his mouth, he knew that this was not the thing to say, and that he would never hear the end of it.

"My wife is good enough for me," he said.

They began to snicker.

From that moment on, it was torture for Wittenberg to remain in the shop. Every time he looked at Speedy he thought he caught a snicker on his face. And the shine was laughing at him, too! The shine had the nerve! Look how he kept his face down, whenever his customer was in Wittenberg's chair, so Wittenberg wouldn't see him laugh.

On Saturday, Speedy returned the ten dollars. Wittenberg shoved the bill into his wallet, without a word.

"What's eating you?" Speedy said. And irrepressibly, "Ain't the wife so good any more? We can still fix it up, huh Tillie?

"Don't you talk about my wife!" Wittenberg growled.

Speedy raised his eyebrow and shrugged.

All week, when they told their dirty jokes, Wittenberg sat in his chair holding a newspaper in front of his face.

Thursday, he felt nervous all day. For what? Over nothing. As five o'clock neared, he thought it would be better if at that moment they both had customers.

But it happened that neither was busy. Sure enough, Speedy, pretending things were the same as ever, sang out, "Hey, sourpuss, gimme a ten spot, I got a new mama tonight."

Wittenberg sat in his chair, silent. Maybe he was a fool. Here Speedy was like reaching out his hand first, like saying forget it, let everything be like old times. And what was he sore about anyhow?

"Come on Witty, loosen up," Speedy said, snapping his fingers, dancing his little feet. "Wait'll you see this baby — mm-mmm!"

The shine licked his chops.

"I haven't got ten dollars," Wittenberg said. And again he knew it was the worst thing to say. Everybody looked straight at his face. His collar became tight. Tillie was looking at him. He could feel the money in his pocket, and felt that they could feel it too. The wallet, and inside of it the folded money; nineteen dollars, he had. Everybody knew that Speedy always paid him back on Saturday. The fellow who always paid back on time was asking him for money and he was pretending not to have it.

In a moment Speedy's face had recovered; it was laughing easily again. "Come on, who you kidding, grandpa. Pull out that roll, give it to somebody who knows what money is for."

"I have no money for you," Wittenberg said.

Speedy's hand was extended. Now he put his arm down, just like when a handshake is refused.

It was not over. Wittenberg felt something more was coming. Speedy called to the shine, "Say Joe, got any bucks?"

"Sure thing," cried the shine. It seemed to Wittenberg that both of them were talking especially loud. Joe pulled out a wad of money.

"Boy you must of been rolling 'em," Speedy remarked.

"I sure was," said the shine. "Man, was I hot last night."

"Gimme ten," said Speedy.

"Sure thing." The shine peeled off two fives. "Is ten plenty? Is ten all you want??

It was as if both of them were pulling an act, making fun of Wittenberg.

"Sure you can spare it? Sure you ain't got a wife?" Speedy said to the shine.

Wittenberg clenched his fingers around the arm of the chair.

After that, going into the shop each morning, for Wittenberg, was like entering a front-line trench. If he saw Speedy already inside, Wittenberg would walk around the block before he could force himself to enter. He took to coming down early; that way he could turn his back when Speedy arrived.

On Saturday, the moment he got his pay, he practically ran out of the place so as not to give Speedy a chance to pull an act when he gave the shine back the ten dollars.

The other two men, Wagner and Jerry Rogers, acted as if nothing had happened. They listened to Speedy's jokes as usual, and kidded the shine about his gambling. This only served to infuriate Wittenberg the more; it was as if they were showing him they sided with Speedy. It was as if all of them were saying out loud, sourpuss, grouch, better to have a nigger around than Wittenberg, the shine is more of a man than Wittenberg.

Another Thursday, the shine was complaining about having been cleaned out in a crap game. Wittenberg waited all day, nervous; but Speedy didn't ask him for money. Speedy didn't ask anybody. At closing time that same girl, Mamie, called for him and they went off, kidding and joking as usual.

Wittenberg felt sore as hell. So he was nobody. So he wasn't even in the shop any more. For two cents he would throw up his job here, he didn't have to work with these cheap bums, he would get a chair in a good hotel shop.

Mrs. Wittenberg had already noticed that something was wrong. As the man's ill-humor grew, she became worried.

"Is there any trouble in the shop?" she asked that night.

He growled no trouble, everything was the same. She tried to be nice to him, but he kept away from her.

Mrs. Wittenberg couldn't figure out what was the matter. She began to think maybe he was tired of her, maybe he wanted someone else. That Speedy was always bringing flashy women into the place.

Finally she decided to find out what was wrong. Things couldn't go on this way.

She wore a knitted dress that clung snugly to her figure; the neck was low, showing just the beginning of the cleft of her firm high breasts.

A thousand times he had told her to keep away from the shop. "Don't come where I work!" he would growl. "That is the shop and this is the home, two different things!" But if something was wrong she had to find out.

On Tuesday, a little after five, Mrs. Wittenberg opened the door of the barber shop and stood there with a feminine hesitant air asking, "Is this where Mr. Wittenberg—?" and seeing him sitting in the chair, the paper held in front of his face, she went towards him. "Oh there you are darling!"

Wittenberg leaped out of his chair. Blood rushed to his face. He opened and shut his mouth.

Everybody was staring at her. The shine had that peculiar, absorbed look on his face, with which he watched white men and their women. His eyes went to the woman's shoes, ankles, and up her snug shape.

Speedy turned frank upraising eyes on the woman, lifted his brows at Wittenberg, then turned to the other men with a leer that plainly said, "Well look at old Wittenberg will you? Nifty, huh?"

Tillie gazed at the woman with the small, guarded smile that attractive women have for each other.

"I was downtown shopping and I thought maybe we would stay downtown for dinner tonight honey," she was saying.

"Huh, yah, yah. What?" Wittenberg clutched the paper. Hot and cold. He was angry, and yet—

She stood, hesitantly, expectantly, waiting for him to do something. The men were staring.

"Uh—smy wife," he said, introducing her.

"How do you do!" Speedy said elaborately, looking deliberately at her face, and down her figure, slowly, and then glancing sharply at Wittenberg.

As Wittenberg left with her, he knew they were all staring at him, with the I'll-be-a-son-of-a-gun kind of look.

"Good enough for my money," he heard Speedy crack, smirking, and he didn't mind. He was okay again, with the boys.

OTIS FERGUSON:

While We Were Laughing

The status of film comedy in America has suffered from two things. The first may be called Hollywood apathy. The second and more important is the low-rating of Hollywood, the breast-beating, the abject apology for the near and native that has been the occupation of our intellectual classes and the stand-by of what leaders they may have in the critics. This last attitude has its importance as attitude, though of all the arts today the movie is the least affected by what thinking people find to think about it.

When I got the Chair of Films in a journal seven years ago, there were two things you could be outside of (1) a trade-critic, whose job is to report on comparative values and box-office chances, and (2) Gilbert Seldes, whose enthusiasms for the vulgar arts were designedly and successfully flash. You were on the dailies as an ex-legman or press-agent with broken wind and a liquid yearning eye on the dramah page; or you went upper-case on the weeklies and monthlies, seeing what played at the arty shoebox houses and speaking sternly in tongues such as the French (*regisseur*) to confound your readers, who felt elevated by the experience and then sneaked off twice a week to see the feature at Loew's.

In those days there were two names operative in American film comedy, and you used them in constant allusion: Chaplin and Disney. Enough authoritative and erroneous articles had been published so that you could mention the Selig and Keystone lots for an historical footnote. Otherwise you stayed abroad, where in Russian films the characters spoke Russian.

I bring this up only because, getting started at that time, I was in at the birth of another institution in American movie humor and was still reading carefully to find out what a critic ought to criticize. And I can report that you could have read the critics' circle until it squared without ever having guessed that within a year of its modest opening "It Happened One Night" would have become an absolutely gilt-edged source of reference for lowbrow and highbrow alike. The film came in as another comedy—oh, quite harmless and amusing if you like that sort of thing. But it stuck so well that—with Capra now gone off the deep end apparently for good, hunting the wild platitude in Shangri-La and all that—his name is spelled in some of the biggest letters that ever went up on a marquee.

And what made him? The critics? Baby talk. The critics have given wilder raves to pictures they couldn't remember the director of to save their space-rates today. Capra had already made a few pictures, his "Lady for a Day" and "The Bitter Tea of General Yen" being clearly recalled by a small but intense following. What made him on this comedy was the public, which went back to "It Happened One Night," and went back again. They talked it

up, and it kept replaying dates all year and became an outstanding example of what the trade calls word-of-mouth build-up. It made history while the historians were asleep. The pay-off was that, while it was just a picture at the beginning of the year and was only in third place in the fall when five hundred national movie reviewers were rounded up in the Film Daily poll, it swept the field of awards by Christmas.

So Capra was a genius, yet was in print; it was enough to say of any other director that he wasn't Capra. In some fonts of type it was only necessary to remark that Hollywood had a director who was *presque regisseur* and to add his name to those of Disney and Charlot (as we lovingly call him) for a perfect three-point landing.

But this sort of thing cuts two ways. A certain universal acceptance and delight will put a director's name up in lights, and reviewers just have to go down the line. But once the people who are all the time talking and writing have got a thing accepted as a topic of polite literary allusion, the bird with the big director's name can throw the weight of his prestige around in either direction. He can make the world's best features and get away with it. Or he can make the world's worst, and for all you can read anywhere he is still getting away with it. And that is where the intellectuals come in, with the sub-intellectuals on the popular magazines and feature-sections following with their tongues hanging down like red neckties. All the talk, talk, talk gives a man a rating. It's the simple human assumption that where there is smoke someone must be burning.

This is where we come to the subject of film comedy in America. It is really a tradition, with the great anonymous back-log of all the people who have worked something out, or set a standard, or patterned a custom, that has to be in anything before it can be a tradition. It isn't just the two or ten names you can remember because they have been spattered all over the place in bold face. Just ask yourself: who made "The Front Page"? "The Gilded Lily"? "My Man Godfrey"? "The Milky Way"? "Sing and Like It"? "The Captain Hates the Sea"? "Forsaking All Others"? "Stage Door"? "The Shop Around the Corner"? "Stand In"? "Twentieth Century"? "Design for Living"? "The Gay Divorcee"? "Jimmie the Gent"? "Something to Sing About"? "I Met Him in Paris"? "Swing High Swing Low"? "The Beachcomber"? "The Thin Man"? "Desire"? "Vivacious Lady"? "Bachelor Mother"?

All right—you remember some of the titles, what the stories were about and who played the leads. But who was responsible for a story's being done the way you remember it? Of course any given picture includes a range of talents and many lucky combinations—with this story but a different cast, or treatment, etc.: with this director but a different producer or budget, etc. (If you try to go past who was responsible for anything *as credited* to who was actually responsible, you will go crazy—let it alone.) The point is that we have in the best pictures a comedy expression that is peculiar to the films. Many men in the American studios worked this funny thing out by hand and at great labor—

yet who of those laughing knew what men they were, or cared?

While we were laughing, were we paying attention? Do we realize even today that there is a form in comedy as native as the air we breathe, that it has been developed partly in writing and on the stage but finds its most individual expression in the quick shadows of the screen? I doubt it.

Like any true thing ever achieved, this form owes many debts to other things and times and places. Its kingpin, Chaplin, got his training in the music-halls of England; its more subtle directors have learned a good deal from Lubitsch and Rene Clair; it is endlessly dependent on what in the Western World is funny and what isn't. But it has used these many old things to make a new thing, and it has been jabbed along to much faster and funnier effects than the old stage ever achieved, *per minute,* by the original demand of films for speed and variety.

This new comedy form, without the presence of flesh-and-blood performers and in the early years without music and voices, placed a severe demand on the department of visual contrasts and upsets. There was no room for gradual development, for the labored, tedious exposition of stage shows, for the stagnant patter of vaudeville turns and minstrel endmen. Something had to be happening all the time, and it couldn't be the same thing. After the first few years, even camera and cutting tricks were old stuff unless they kept being new stuff or were used differently.

Against these challenges to the inventive mind, the men of the old Mack Sennett productions worked day and night. It is too easy to remember that the pies thrown were invariably coconut-custard and five inches deep. It is not so easy to identify such elemental confectionary with comedy as we know it today. But what they were working on was the outline of it: the fast and furious, the surprise through a new kind of motion developed in the camera eye and the cutting room. Since something had to be happening every minute, new effects were devised on location, and pioneers in the technical department kept on developing ways to make them more visible—learning that there is an angle and an instant at which the true point of any motion may be caught, figuring distances and planes and cutting possibilities toward this end. Although the main formula for early comedy, as still remembered by its ever-bawdy and succinct practitioners, was "a kick in the ass and cut to chase," the way of capturing this for the screen was vastly complicated and became not only more so but a governing factor in the business of making comedy and still getting a laugh.

Now it is ironic but provable that before Capra the one man to make best uses of the screen art as it had been developed in the old days by Keystone was Rene Clair, whose early sound pictures have never been surpassed for what I call the old domino play. That is, you take one incident good enough in itself to set off a laugh, and then use it to explode another, and before anybody has recovered from the first, let alone the second, you apply both to setting off a third. It goes like string-firecrackers. The first gets you off-balance, the second knocks you over altogether, and the third jumps up and down on your

chest. At ninety feet of film per minute, the process only runs about twenty or thirty feet, but it always takes you the next five hundred to recover.

Here a parenthesis to say that this is no jingo piece: Clair took the best available things in film technique when he was ready to use them; it didn't matter a hole in the snow where they had been developed; it mattered everything what he was able to make out of them, which was the first truly modern film comedy. Whatever he got was in the manner of treatment, not second-hand ideas for things to treat—which, I am sorry to say, was exactly the thing got from his "A Nous la Liberte" by our beloved Charlot for the conveyor-belt sequence in "Modern Times."

The parenthesis should, in fact, be extended to French films in general, for the Frenchmen are the only producers who have approached comedy on our level. (The Russians have done some fine real-life comedy, but mostly in pictures where comedy was strictly in passing, no more than relief.) A distinction not frequently enough made is that the most French thing about most French movies is that there are Frenchmen in them. Actually, the effects are achieved by players recruited from the Parisian stage, which ranks with that of Moscow as one of the greatest theatre reservoirs ever heard of. And by those familiar with the French habit of literature. When comedy in the French manner is good it is terrific, droll, and lovely at once. But this should not blind us to the fact that what there is in it of actual screen art is something the Hollywood men have worked out and taken for granted years before—and to the fact that French pictures often seem to have been taken in somebody's cellar with a pocket kodak.

The French are droll. O.K. Making pictures in an off-hand way at something like a nickel a throw, they do not have a big and stifling mass-production business around their necks. They can dare to fool around with the more charming aspects of life as people live it. O.K.

But, to end the parenthesis, what we are talking about is the development of screen comedy as a department of art in itself, owing goodness knows what to the stage, the original burlesque idea, the vaudeville blackout, and the comic postcard—but assimilating all of them and still remaining unique.

In the jumping invention of American movie comedies there was a general drying-up after the crazy, cuff-shooting Mack Sennett days, with their near-perfection of the balanced plank, the pratfall, the pie, the teeter, the ubiquitous chase. We gradually got over into the comedy with the star in it. Whereas you could once hang a sign in front of the theater with just the word Keystone, it got to be, for years, a Buster Keaton picture, a Harold Lloyd picture, a Ham Hamilton short, a W. C. Fields short, an Our Gang short. Or it was the legitimate-stage type of drawing-room ruckus, advertised as a Wallace Reid or Douglas Fairbanks or Adolphe Menjou picture. Even the cartoons didn't keep their identity: people went to see a Mickey Mouse, knowing the guy behind it was Disney to be sure—but how long do you think the Fleischer studios have been working, and would you be able to say even today who produces Popeye and who Betty Boop and whether either or both ever had anything to do with the "Out

of the Inkwell'' series? Comedy in the twenties became pretty dull and copycat, I am afraid, and a thing like the Broadway stage, where it is abundantly known that nobody cares what the book is like if Ed Wynn is playing it.

The big change and new impetus came with the introduction of sound and the addition of ripping dialogue to the original bedlam of the visual gagmen. Sound was an expensive and rather horrible trick at first; but after 1930 comedy really began to take over. Sound opened up the field for the voice of Jimmy Durante, with its overtones of someone making a prison break through a set of iron bars; for such madmen as the Marx Brothers; for a list of minor and major roles you can make as long as your arm. The movies began to approach naturalism—and that seems their dedicated goal.

And as they approached naturalism, emphasis was thrown more to character, not as played by some renegade from the Broadway tradition of saying "Morning, Zeke'' as though eating a pork chop, but as devised in the script and worked into some place in the overall framework. They were American characters—what else could they have been? They came from every kind of place and tried out for all kinds of parts. The old stock roles of City Slicker, Cranky Spinster, Deacon, and Uncle Tom were being chased off the set simply because they had become cartoons and cartoons don't talk. The movies had the means and the press-agent flamboyance to screen-test anything that could get out of bed and walk. They didn't have to develop a school of acting. They accumulated, from all the fields of entertainment, including real life, a gallery of natural types such as was never seen on the face of the earth.

This applies to Hollywood in general, but particularly to comedy. The majority of the people you see on any screen today were people before they were actors, and it is hard for them to forget it. Under bad direction and their own worst compulsions they are typed without mercy. But given leeway or tricked into being natural, there they stand and talk and breathe at you, the whole amazing lot of them, busboys and hotel clerks and court clerks and plug-uglies and C. Aubrey Smith, but from life.

Hollywood at its best is as near to American humor at its best as you will get, purely because Hollywood has the fabulous wealth and appeal to get everybody from anywhere, professional or not. W. C. Fields, say, is a veteran trouper, operating the perpetual shell-game by which he once undoubtedly paid the rent. They have him. Frank Albertson, say, was so recently cutting out of high school for a quick butt between classes that he couldn't possibly make a Barrymore out of the situation even if his uncle's name were Drew. They have him.

In having these people to work with, to nurse along or hold back, the director has come back into his own—at least as much as the producer will let him. He has them and he has his story: when both are right and he is right, he makes pictures that have a styling, a speed and lightness and frequency of absurd surprise that combines sight, sound, motion, and recognition into something like music. When there is such styling, with its inevitable base in the life all around, there is a good approximation of what is most typical and good in

American humor, which is fast and salty, a bit sentimental and a bit frantic, tough and gay and sweet.

Of course there may not be any such thing as American humor. All I know is I keep laughing every now and then.

If you will think back to "It Happened One Night," you will remember that it wasn't the plot, which was corny, or the dialogue, which was of the sort to snap the brim of a very old hat very smartly. It was a trick of building a whole thing out of little ordinary things, all caught in the shifting eye of the camera and picked out as clearly within the cross-country bus with its ranged seats and mission through the night as over the countryside and in the cabins later; and all joined to make a pattern of life as we all know it, with the unfailing tough surface and the grace beneath that we at least hope to find. It had the direction of a man who had a special talent for the mixed absurdity and loveliness of little things. But, more important, it had a man with the whole range of a medium at his back—a medium that had long studied and finally developed a way to bring up the constant and perfectly focused detail until it became the main thing by sheer force of numbers and their light progression; and common people and common things became real, and eloquent.

Though the movies had already produced fast, nifty pieces like "The Front Page" and "Design for Living," 1934 was a calendar year for American pictures in more ways than that "It Happened One Night" introduced it. Three or four months later we had "The Thin Man," which kept romance on a modified scale and added crime-detection and had people laughing and holding their breaths until the time more than two years later when it was called in to make way for the sequel. "Twentieth Century" came about the same time and managed some ripping comedy before it got down to the shrill and rather made-up business of the original stage play. And toward the end of the year, the Astaire-Rogers "Gay Divorcee" just about rounded everything out, with music, dancing, and a balance of high-frequency comedy that hasn't been equalled by anything in the class since, or before.

It wasn't that something new had been given the world, but merely that the movies had arrived at a new ease and maturity in form, a form that became most distinguishable in that it had tempered all effects from wipe-dissolves to Clark Gable into a steady line of clear motion. The funny character with or without the funny pants, the funny incidents, the gag and the breakaway and the wash-tub full of cake-dough, were assimilated into the progression of a main effect—namely, the whole story and the whole show. Since understatement had become possible through the new fluidity of camera eye and cutting scissors, the thumps and mugging of unrelated clowning were out. To a master of this new art, it was possible for the first time in any art to make the sentiment and absurdity of life as natural on a black-and-white screen as getting up from a good breakfast in a sunny room, kissing your wife a hurried bye-dear-back-at-six, and discovering it was your mother-in-law or somebody with a mustache like her.

With "My Man Godfrey" in the middle of 1936, the discovery of the

word screwball by those who had to have some words to say helped build the thesis of an absolutely new style in comedy. Actually a movie released two and a half years before was not only consistently funnier but more screwball as well—only nobody knows what it is. The film, "Sing and Like it," hangs very near the main entrance of the Ferguson gallery. And a half year before that they got out another prominent Ferguson acquisition called "The Milky Way," which was just as fine and crazy as anything that had ever been called by a new name for pure dumb lack of knowing the venerable branch of the family it honored.

In the five years or so since, there have been a thousand tries and dismal misses. But there have been "The Captain Hates the Sea," "Stage Door," "Bachelor Mother," "Ninotchka," etc. Comedy may get something new and better some day, but it hasn't yet; and when it is good in its tradition, it is still tops so far as we know. The argument isn't, of course, that, once you have such a tradition of speed, relevance, and gayety, you can just go out and knock off laughs as with a cookie cutter. It is rather that this tradition is forever there as a means to production for use and for laughter. The form is ready to hand and a ferryboat to glory for the man who has the talent to find it out and use it. It is complex, but it may be made as bright and warm as sunshine; and among all the things men can do, it is a thing inimitable.

MARYA ZATURENSKA:

Lightning for Atmosphere

The warriors, tigers, flowers of Delacroix
Painted upon the walls, ablaze with light,
Pure light, moon-blanched, that unstained white
Queen of the colors, whom all other tints destroy,
Color of the stealing moon.

Or white lightning, seascapes of Chateaubriand,
Shores the dramatic ocean beats upon,
Where the lone hero, gloomy on the wild strand,
Sees friends and lovers and companions gone,
Hawk, gull, and heron flying.

White-capped mountains, peaks of dazzling snow,
Cloud-pointed Alps, sharp, unclimbable heights,
Burning effulgence of the northern lights
Toward whose clear radiance our desire grows,
White heat of the infinite.

The intense young lady seen in a dream long gone,
Ringletted, lonely, in her villa by the sea
Peers through a misted window, sees the floating swan,
Wild geese whiten the sky, lighten the fir tree,
Shrill, sound-shattering solitude.

White-gowned in the thin nocturnal air
She throws her book aside, and her fine ear
Hears flying catches of joy, the ecstatic fear,
Whiteness of the abyss; through the soul's precipice
Dark flows the midnight of her falling hair.

She through a deep hallucination seeing
Strong waves from sheer salt oceans, drowned lovers
Pallid and proud. The white blank mind discovers
Figures rising from waterfalls, appearing, fleeing
Into damp creeks, into the steep ravines.

All hearts have their precipices, Alps, white peaks,
Moments when the white bird with the deep wound must come

To sing and swoon upon enchanted willows;
The heart disguises its symbols, peers through the hid ravines,
Steep-gaping between wars.

JOSEPHINE MILES:

Accompaniment

Mercedes was the lady's name and she had in her voice
A batch of tunes to tell the day how it was doing.
Often about eleven she would start one after another
Very silently, and come to no conclusion.

Afternoon, though, the day could stop any time,
Break up its traffic, bid its criers peace,
Seize the miraculous instant, and hear tuned
Under Royal keys what Mercedes thought of it.

Pike

What was that they heard past the peal
Of the booth's bells and the squeal
Round the turned edges of the wide red sucker?
Past the turn of the game wheel,
The surf of ocean.

Here's your hot ham, folks, tells
To the peal of the booth's bells,
To the round red face round the red sucker,
The driven voice that spells
Ham to the ocean.

What was that the licker heard
That her tongue slow on the third
Round tasted there more of salt than strawberry sucker,
Marking without a word
The lick of ocean?

Here's the turn of the wheel, folks, cries
To the wheel's fall and rise,
To the fall of dimes and the face of the all day sucker,
The driven voice to the rise
And fall of ocean.

GILBERT NEIMAN:

Kermess

They had been having a big time with the jaripeo in the afternoon, lassoing the bulls, hogtying them, and riding them. The bulls were not brave, however. They had been brought in from the fields. They were bulls for work, not for sport, and they all ran back for the pen after their first charge out. They were very bad bulls. There was one good one, but no one wanted to ride him. There must have been about thirty charros on horses with ropes, and they were all bored; they scattered in surprise, trying to get out of the way, when he came out. The charros had been acting very vain and haughty at the lack of good bulls, and when the good one came out it was so unexpected that they had all they could do to keep out of its way. One man finally got a front hoof, throwing his lasso from a respectable distance, and threw him. No one offered to ride him after they got him tied It took them twenty minutes to tie him. They finally opened the gate to the pen and slapped hard with their palms on the inside of the corral fence, calling "Toro," and making ah-ha noises in their throats like bleating sheep. The bull eventually calmed down and hobbled in to rejoin the tame ones from the fields, but it took a lot of time and persuasion to make him.

In the evening there was a kermess. All kinds of booths were up for eating and drinking. There were two gambling tables of *pares o nones* and three or four of cards and blocks. You laid your money on a card, the blocks were upset, and if one of the blocks finished rolling down the incline with a card matching yours face up, you were paid off five to one. Most of the Indians bet only pennies, except on *pares o nones,* where they would sometimes risk as much as a twenty-cent piece.

The young unmarried girls were dancing beneath a level tarpaulin hung low over the space between the two long rows of booths. There was an occasional married couple among them. The couples shuffled down one side of the center poles and up the other, raising a fine, powdery dust which was not visible in the dim electric light but which tickled your nose. Every once in a while, you would hear someone sneeze and someone else yell "Salud!" The families were lined up along the sides to watch the dancers. Some had brought chairs on which the mothers and elder daughters sat, fathers and brothers standing over them. In the aisles between the families and the booths were constantly roving the loose males, some of them tall and lean with the hungry stare of the young dissipated Indian who is feeling the need of a woman. There were a great many rouged girls from the cantinas interspersed among the pairs dancing. It was easy to single them out by the way they danced. Some of the Indian girls from respectable families danced closely, but not that way.

Right in front of a center booth, when a haupango was over, a lithe, undissipated Indian with dignified eyes returned a young, light brown girl with plaits to the vacant chair beside her mother. She smiled bashfully at her mother as she sat. He nodded his head gravely and walked through the couples that strolled in a circle between pieces to his original post on the opposite side of onlookers. They had not exchanged a word. He had asked her father if he could have the dance, and those were the only words she had heard him speak. Her eyes were on his back as he made his way through the couples, but when he reached the other side and turned to look at her, her eyes were following the passing couples. Her father was massively built and looked as if he had killed enough men in the revolution. He towered over the two chairs, swaying on his feet a little. He swayed steadily.

A squat, stocky mestizo with grease on his chin and a smear of red chili sauce on his shirt left the center booth where he had been eating and watching to tap the father on the back and ask permission to dance with the girl. The burly, swaying parent looked uninterestedly down at the insignificantly little fellow and did not condescend to reply in words. He was feeling a warm, assenting mood, however, so he made a complying gesture with his hand and stared back at the dancers. After all, the main purpose of these dances should be to get daughters respectably married off before they reached an age when they would do something less respectable on their own. Every man, tall or short, thin or fat, was a prospect. The mestizo walked around the chairs and, planting himself before the girl, stuck out an arm, as if he were going to yank her up. She was seated passively in her chair, enjoying the dancing, which had just started. His being squarely in front of her did not seem to spoil her view or annoy her in the least. She simply watched the dancers to one side of him.

"Come on, nina. Let's dance."

She did not hear him; she was serenely intent on the sight of the circulating, shuffling couples. She was looking down at the end, where the circle went from one lane to another.

"Come on and dance. Your father said yes" He stiffened his arm, hand ready to grasp.

The girl gave him a glance of distant curiosity, and shook her head as if she were shaking off a fly. He jerked his hand down to his side, and glared at her with the red hot eyes of an angry bull.

"Your father told me yes."

She did not see him any more. He was not there any more as far as she was concerned; she was placidly pleased with the spectacle of the dancers. He looked up with hot eyes at her father, who did not see him either. He was moving back and forth, seemingly hypnotized by the rhythm of the dancers, but really heeding the hot ebb and flow in his stomach. The mestizo shrugged his shoulders and went to the center booth behind the family and ordered a beer.

A skinny Indian, as young but not as handsome as the first one, pushed through the dancers from the other side, and, standing where the mestizo had

stood, caught the father's attention and received a nod. The girl arose and he put a long arm about her, keeping his distance. They danced smoothly together. He could not do a huapango as well as the first boy, but when the band went into a danzon he did that very well. The medley lasted ten minutes and he returned the girl to her seat just as the mestizo was buying his third beer.

It was several minutes before the orchestra commenced the next dance, which was a jarana about Vera Cruz. No one came up to ask for the girl this time. The mestizo drained his beer bottle and walked to one side of her chair, tapping her on the shoulder and pointing to the dancers. She turned sidewise on her chair, so that her back was to him. He stared at the tightly woven plaits down her wide back, looking them up and down. Then he shrugged his shoulders again and returned to the same booth, where he paid for a taco and demanded that they put more sauce on it His eyes were fiery red; the extra sauce brought tears which he blinked back. He watched the father, who was swaying less rhythmically on his feet, having lost the ebb and flow sensation by thinking too much about the girls he saw dancing. The tall parent walked to a different booth and ordered a bottled lemonade, resting his broad hands on the counter for support. He had been drinking pulque since the day before.

The stubby mestizo wiped the fresh sauce from his chin and streaked his dirty white pants with it. He went over to the girl and stood directly in front of her as he had done the first time, stretching out his left hand, placing his right one on the belt under his jacket.

"Come on and dance this one," he said.

The girl stared at him fully in the eye and said no, her voice unexpectedly strong and deep. He flushed for a moment, as if she had called him a bad name; then biting his upper lip in, he pulled his right hand out from under his leather jacket, and before you could say or do anything she was lying doubled up and moaning on the ground, her nose in the fine upper layer of powdery dust. After he did it, the mestizo dropped both hands to his side and stood gaping down at her, his mouth wide open, looking as if he had just hit her very hard with his fist and taken her wind out. Two men, who had been dancing, grabbed his arms, and he did not resist. All along that line of onlookers the word ran, and three soldiers in faded khaki came trotting down the aisle between the families and the booths to the place where the thing had happened. The two Indian dancers gripped him firmly, although his arms were limp. One of the soldiers stooped, rolled over the girl's body, and pulled out the knife. When the knife came out it was dripping bright blood. The man commenced bucking.

A third Indian reached his throat from behind and stopped his bucking against them. When the hold on his throat was released, he slumped his head down on his chest and stared at the girl dully. The soldier who had removed the knife felt her wrist and then put his hand gently inside her dress, feeling low under her left breast. His fingers came out red and he looked up glumly at the two Indians gripping the runt of a mestizo, who was starting to buck again. Another pressure on his throat, and he quickly stopped

The father, who had been out vomiting behind the booth, came into the

group and attempted to talk to the soldiers, asking foolish questions, too sick to believe his eyes. The soldiers did not answer, but some men in the gathering crowd patted him consolingly on the back, and said the pendejo would be shot the next day. That was, of course, a lie, because it was well known that the mestizo's brother was a ministro in the town Court House, and nothing ever happened to brothers of ministros. It made no difference, though, because the father did not hear a word of what they said, and asked over and over again if that could be his daughter lying there on the ground. The music had stopped, and the musicians who could leave their instruments joined the enlarging circle. Some more soldiers in less faded khaki came up, and finally a sub-lieutenant with a pistol.

The sub-lieutenant was all efficiency, preening himself with the chance of showing his authority. He snapped questions at the soldiers and looked professionally at the girl and at the criminal. Someone had spat on the little mestizo and the saliva was running down his forehead; he could not rub it off because the Indians would not release his arms. Way was cleared, and three soldiers in front and two behind with the sub-lieutenant and his drawn pistol, marched him off. The Indians holding his arms were allowed the pleasure of dragging him, his toes drawing parallel lines in the dust. He would not take a step and they dragged him along twenty yards. Then the lieutenant booted him. The mestizo gave a grunt and started walking.

It was an hour after the knifing that two young men came from the hospital in an old Ford to pick up the body. A group of men had taken the father away, no one knew where. The old woman was left sitting there alone, staring at her daughter. She did not cry. She was furious at everybody, but she did not strike or scratch anyone, because she could still see her girl's body. No one dared to speak to her. She followed the hospital attendants and refused to be helped into the back seat of the Ford. She sat down there with the girl lying in front of her on the stretcher that the young men had balanced across the two doors of the back seat. The attendants from the hospital got in front and drove off down the deep-pitted road, the dead girl's body jolting heavily up and down on the blood-stained, sagging, half-rotten canvas.

EDWA MOSER:

Pedro

Pedro, the garrulous, who told us all the gossip of Cuernavaca; Pedro, whose faun's eyes would fill with tears if I did not cut as many of his flowers as he thought I should; Pedro carried pistol, *machete,* and knife. He showed them to the boys. He showed me his recommendation papers, which stated that he was to be considered dangerous when intoxicated, a phrase which did not abash him in the least—nor restrain him. Regularly, every Saturday and every feast day, Pedro became intoxicated.

But he did not neglect his duty as *portero,* which was, as he never gave me a chance to forget, a notch higher than a *mozo.*

He lived by the gate in the *portero's* lodge, one room, very clean and neat, with a single bed, a dresser and chair, and a covered porch furnished with a stove and a table. The place was perfectly equipped for a single inhabitant; but Pedro was not single. Magdelena and her young son lived, somehow, in the one room with him. Pedro was exceptionally handsome, with his measured profile and beautiful liquid eyes, and he carried himself like a king. All the girls, we soon learned, were wild about him. That was why we got so many letters in our box addressed to so many different names. For each girl Pedro called himself by a different name. He supplied me with a list of names I might expect on his mail and from time to time he would ask to have it back so that he might proudly add a new one.

Magdelena, we gathered, shared his pride of conquest rather than resented it. Magdelena was not pretty. She was too thin, too putty-colored, and she was older than Pedro; but she had a certain winsome charm, a quaint lilting lisp, and she was, for me, a source of immense comfort. Magdelena did not get drunk. I could be sure when Pedro was drunk, that she would keep the gate locked. I could also feel sure that she would know how to handle him when he showed up.

But she was not his wife. Pedro had made that fact clear to Hansel, our landlord, after a particularly lively spree when Pedro had beat Magdelena rather more than usual.

"This woman has not the honor to be my wife," he had announced. "She is only my love."

It was the duty of a love, it seemed, to serve the lordly Pedro his meals first, Magdelena standing in attendance behind his chair. It was also her duty to comb and oil his hair, to lace and shine his shoes, to button his shirt and spray him well with perfume—all on her porch in full sight of mine—and for no other purpose than that he might go out and make love to some one else. What she and her little boy lived with him for we could not imagine. Yet Pedro seemed to be kind to the child. He told me he liked children. Drunk or

sober, he said, he liked them.

One day, I looked out toward Pedro's house and saw a new child on his porch. A young one, very fat, sitting in a high chair. I could hardly believe my eyes. Even in Mexico, I told myself, this was not possible . . . I hastened to inquire.

"*Mi hijo!*" Pedro said fondly, laying his hand upon his heart.

He was its father, he related; its mother lived a few houses up the street. Unfortunately, she had become ill. She would not be able to take proper care of the child for some time. It was a fine child, was it not? Many had said the eyes were like his own. So, naturally, he had brought it home until the mother recovered. He, Pedro, was not one to neglect his children.

At that moment, Magdelena appeared with a bowl of rice, and she began to feed the baby, both of them making little cooing noises like a pair of pigeons.

"Isn't it lovely, Senora, to have a baby in the house?" Magdelena lisped. "Its mother can take all the time she wants to get well."

All this, of course, was naturally very confusing, especially to my ten-year-old Molly. And it became more confusing when Magdelena confided to Molly that the baby's mother was not all she should be.

"She has babies by all kinds of people!" Magdelena lisped.

"What does Magdelena think about herself?" Molly asked. "But then," she added, "it's all different when you can't read and write."

Magdelena could not read or write a word, but she knew how to evaluate people. She knew Molly could be depended on. She asked Molly to count the money she was saving to buy a sewing machine. First, she made Molly swear an oath not to reveal the amount nor the whereabouts of the money to Pedro. Molly swore. Then Magdelena dug up the little pot she kept buried in the earthern floor. In it was a wad of bills she had been earning on the sly for years. She had a hundred and twenty-five pesos. Molly counted it and told Magdelena what the total was.

"How do you know?" Magdelena whispered. "How can you be sure?"

"These are fives," Molly explained, making two piles to illustrate, "and these are tens."

Magdelena shook her head.

"It isn't fair," she burst out, "the way they fool a person. They could just as easily be different colors so one could know what one had without having to ask."

Then they put the bills back into the jug and buried it again and set a flower pot over the place, and Molly, full of importance, came to tell me, I being privy to all secrets. I didn't like it, though I had to confirm her sense of importance by making her swear all over again that she would not tell a soul what she knew. Not Conchita nor Fila nor the boys. I felt very sure Pedro was not a man to take chances with.

That night he came home very drunk. We were just sitting down to supper on the porch, when without a sound, I saw Pedro pick Magdelena up by the neck and fling her out of the house onto the lawn. She turned a somersault like

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a hoop and lay still under a bush. I did not wait to see if she got up again.

"Take the table in!" I commanded, so sharply there was no time to question or demur.

Each of us picked up a table leg and carried our supper into the house.

"The money!" Molly cried, and clamped her hand over her mouth.

Don had already scooted out the back way and shouted for Hansel. By the time he came, Magdelena had got up, unharmed it seemed, and was scuttling from bush to bush, still without a sound, and bent over like a jack-rabbit, while Pedro pursued her just one step behind, swinging his *machete* in great murderous swathes about his head. Hansel came quickly. He did not say anything. He simply drew his revolver and fired one emphatic shot into the air. Pursuer and pursued stopped as though turned to stone. For quite three minutes I don't think any of us moved a muscle. And then, simply, Magdelena had slipped off somehow through the shadows, Pedro had vanished—they were not there. The garden we looked into was completely empty.

"I want to get Magdelena!" Molly began.

"No!" Hansel counselled. "Better you leave them to mind their own businesses. And better you should take this," he added, handing me the revolver.

Ken and Don were delighted. They fetched their own *machetes,* and laid them on the table. Certainly, if Pedro had been after the money, and if he had had any intention of trying to make us tell where it was, he would have found a formidable array of weapons laid out to meet him. But we did not see him or hear any sound of either of them all that night. And the money was never mentioned until a few days later when Magdelena announced that Pedro was entertaining.

They had made up their quarrel. They had bought a sewing machine. Pedro (possibly repenting the episode of the *machete*) had nobly added the needed fifteen pesos, so that all Magdelena had had to spend was her hundred and twenty-five.

"Wasn't it generous of Pedro?" Magdelena asked Molly.

The party began about four. The house and the porch had been decked out with flowers. A long queue of men and women in their best sombreros and shawls, their best *sarapes,* filed from the bronze gate to the door of the one room where the sewing machine, also brave in flowers, stood ready for the guests. Pedro, fittingly perfumed, a flower behind his ear, was master of ceremonies. As each guest filed by, Pedro gave a demonstration of what wonderful things the sewing machine could accomplish. He tucked, he gathered, hemmed a neat hem. Magdelena was kept busy providing refreshments for the visitors who thronged the porch. But she was far from dissatisfied.

"Wasn't it wonderful?" she lisped happily to Molly, when all was over, "Pedro giving that lovely party? Think how much the sewing machine must have enjoyed it . . . "

AUGUST DERLETH:

Wisconsin Landscape

Sunlight yellow, yellow as wine
dark on land, the clouds go over;
grazing cows follow no track
and sunlight dreams on wheat in stack.

Dark on the loam
and the pasture's green,
dark on home
of man, alike on nest of mouse,
the clouds,
the clouds go over, east to west,
and make dark signatures upon earth's breast.

Over the golden wheat and the field of clover,
over the fence where the wild grapes twine;
and the sunlight comes, the sunlight goes,
yellow, yellow as wine . . .
clouds,
the summer clouds go swiftly over.

All air is windless, still;
the cowbell sounds distantly over the hill,
and clouds go swiftly, east to west,
dark in the sky, dark on the swell
and dip of land: over the field,
over the hill and prairie land,
over the house
where one man keeps his little industry,
summer goes high, high in the sky,
summer in clouds gone over fast,
as soon the summer is past.

Cattle in field and wheat in shock:
somewhere the bullsnake takes sunlight on his rock:
trees dark, and hills
before the sunlight spills—
the clouds, the summer clouds go over,
and the sun burst out beyond, the summer sun,
yellow as wine, yellow as gold—
and old . . .

OLIVE B. WHITE:

Light in the Shadows

VAN WYCK BROOKS: *New England Indian Summer,* 1865-1915. E. P. Dutton.

In the last chapter of *The Flowering of New England,* Mr. Brooks declared as an obvious conclusion: "This movement of mind in New England followed the typical pattern of the 'culture-cycle,' as Spengler has convincingly described it . . . There is a springtime feeling in the air . . . There is a moment of equipoise, a widespread flowering of the imagination . . . What has once been vital becomes provincial; and the sense that one belongs to a dying race dominates and poisons the creative mind." While he there resisted the easy temptation to press a formula far, Mr. Brooks suggested more than once in the earlier book that a killing frost was about to blacken all the glorious bloom he had grown to love as jealously as Bancroft, Parkman, and Henry Adams cherished their roses. In fact, the very joy of the first volume may dispose readers to fear what the enthusiast will report of the garden on the morrow. After such a summer, what glow, what color, what strayed June warmth can qualify as authentic Indian summer? New England's high prizing of that season as its peculiar treasure necessarily stiffens the test.

The tone of the new book, then, is one of its chief triumphs. Incidentally, the single mention of Spengler here occurs in a passing comment on Brooks Adams' theory of history; the flourishing metaphor has prevailed over the formula. Refreshing in modern American literary self-appraisal as was the discriminating exuberance of *The Flowering,* it must have troubled disparagers less than the critically temperate, generous appreciations of the later phase may disturb their convictions of decay and death. No one can really blame critics and historians for taking at face value all the New England talk, over fifty years, about waning force, the oncoming glacier, the ice-night of the region. Yet New England abounds in lively anecdotes concerning the death-bed energy of octogenarians, and many a wind-disciplined tree on its headland looks as though it has lived because dying is an even harder process for the strong-rooted. Having talked persuasively, confessionally, and long about dying, the spirit of the region discovered it had but wintered, and without apology for having been such an unconscionable time, it stirred to the new spring on which Mr. Brooks sets the door ajar in his last chapter, "Second March." In vernal 1915, a more cheerful strain than the elegiac farewell to Emerson of 1865 marks his parting with Robert Frost—witness the closing sentences of the two books: "Others, as they saw him, tall and slender, leaving the village behind him, might have said to themselves with the Swedish poet, 'The last skald walks over the meadows' "; and "So paternal was he, and so human, that many a younger writer felt about him as Gorky felt about Tolstoy, 'I am not an orphan on the earth as long as

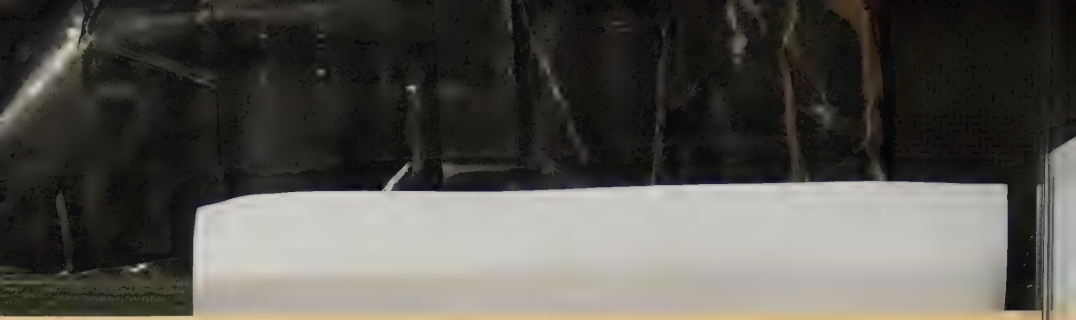
this man lives on it.' ''

It would be a mistake to think of Mr. Brooks as heading a critical inhalator-squad determined to save a victim equally determined to die. To the tomb its due. With an artist's appreciation of the haunting theme—in Miss Wilkins, Henry Adams, Robinson, O'Neill, and many others—he recognizes the triumphs of desolation and death through the decades after the Civil War. The war, the migration westward, the lure of the cities, the low tone of public and business life, the want of great causes to quicken the stagnant blood, all led to mortal debility. Mr. Brooks' critical originality in these chapters of literary and intellectual history lies in his perception of the light as well as the familiar shadows. He sees, for example, that a gross and vulgar age ''Boston had an advantage over other cities''; he sees the country people who ''kept their tops green in the driest summer.''

Naturally enough, *Indian Summer* preserves the rhythmic pattern set by *The Flowering*: from decade to decade it examines the work of the major figures—the lingering giants of the earlier day, as well as Howells, the Jameses, Parkman, Adams—and chapters the lesser people and those of more compact achievement. Though to make a virtue of a basic qualification for criticism is to risk framing an insult, this needs saying: Mr. Brooks has read so alertly and thoroughly in the literature he is appraising that his scholarship is half the secret of his tonic freshness. He has dusted off books almost forgotten in their own home, *The Jonny-Cake Papers* of Thomas Hazard, Colonel Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment,* Lucretia Hale's *Peterkin Papers,* and many more; and he has mentioned so many works invitingly that even a hurrying reader should end *Indian Summer* with a padful of titles to hunt out next winter. In its concern with musicians, painters, sculptors, scientists, collectors, superlative talkers and teachers, and unflagging friends of genius, as well as the central writers, this is a rich book.

Out of his scholar's store Mr. Brooks knows how to pluck the vivid detail, the x-raying incident. Here, for example, is Emily Dickinson's father: ''He was said to have laughed on one occasion, but usually he was as cold and still as the white marble mantel in his parlour. The story was told in Amherst, however, that once he had rung the church-bell as if to summon the people to a fire. The whole town came running, for he rang the bell excitedly. He wished to call attention to the sunset.'' Sometimes a passage has the charm of the pure essay—such a one as that analyzing Americans' inability to forget New England or this brief sentence in a footnote: ''Where, in his childhood, an American has first shuffled his autumn leaves, that is where his heart lies, there he belongs.'' If you prefer wit, sip the tart description of T. S. Eliot's ''singular mode of Christianity,—small faith, less hope, no charity at all.''

By way of personal identification, Mr Brooks says in his preface, ''I am not myself a New Englander, except in part by heredity and in part by adoption.'' That combination has been often powerful in love and praise and free-tongued enough to say what New Englanders themselves count true and just as thoughts but somewhat unbecoming as utterance.



COLEMAN ROSENBERGER:

Consuming Its Rag and Bone

W. B. YEATS: *Last Poems and Plays.* The Macmillan Company.

These last poems, all written after Yeats' seventy-first year, are a worthy addition to the whole body of the poet's work. While there is no single lyric here which will take its place with the most memorable of his poems, all of them are written in that unadorned, tough-fibered lyricism which Yeats, in mid-career, made his own; and if there is a diminution of poetic talent it is rarely perceptible.

The volume has its special value as Yeats' last poetic comment on many things. Not least of these is his explicit commentary upon his own career. In "What Now?" it is given to the ghost of Plato to question whether that career has any final value. The young man at school, who filled his time with work and who shared his comrades' belief that he would become famous, is first faced with the query of Plato's ghost, "What then? . . . What then?" The query again comes to the poet "When everything he wrote was read" and his money matched his needs. And finally:

> 'The work is done,' grown old he thought
> 'According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in nought,
> Something to perfection brought;'
> *But Louder Sang That Ghost, 'What Then?'*

But it is characteristic that Yeats would allow the ghost of no lesser person than Plato to question the worth of his work. Surely he would not permit the query to any man "thrown upon this filthy modern tide." For in more than one poem here Yeats records that he lived into a time in which he found little to respect. It is a time "All out of shape from toe to top" and "all the Olympians" are gone.

Yeats' case for the degeneracy of the times is less persuasive when one examines the golden age for which he laments. The "Olympians" turn out to be Lady Gregory, John Synge, and the rest: the world which he sees lost is no larger than that bounded by the circle of his immediate associates. The real ills of our time he overlooks to admonish, "Irish poets . . . / Sing the peasantry, and then / Hard riding country gentlemen."

To keep from losing patience it is necessary to recall that such a preoccupation produced "The Song of Wandering Aengus."

Love remains the begetter of the poems. Asks the lady, "And if your love were gone / How could you sing those songs of love?" And in his own person Yeats queries, "Those masterful images . . . out of what began?" and answers, "Old bones, old rags, that raving slut." But Yeats realizes the limitations here, and in "An Acre of Grass," one of the finest things in the volume, he writes:

> Nor the mill of the mind
> Consuming its rag and bone
> Can make the truth known.
>
> Grant me an old man's frenzy
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till truth obeyed his call.

The two brief plays, "Purgatory" and "The Death of Cuchulain," are less important in their own right than are the poems, and they afford less important insight into the mind of Yeats. Both plays are about old and lonely men, and in "The Death of Cuchulain" the poet's disaffection for his time comes close to petulancy: the audience is to be limited to a hundred, for "if there are more than a hundred I won't be able to escape people who are educating themselves out of book societies and the like."

But for all this Yeats has used language as have few men, and it is apparent here that he was a master to the last.

KERKER QUINN:

The Artist and World War I

RAINER MARIA RILKE: *Wartime Letters.* Translated and annotated by M. D. Herter Norton. W. W. Norton and Company.

The newest volume in Mrs. Norton's notable series of Rilke translations provides an answer to a question that we ask ourselves every day while reading the front page: What is the artist, the intellectual experiencing in Europe on or near the battlefront? Is he indignant or passive, escape-seeking or benumbed, hopeful or hopeless?

In the not-so-different conflict of twenty-five years ago, Rilke was all of these things. Had he been writing his memoirs many years after the war, he might have simplified and ordered his feelings; but in letters addressed to close friends at various stages in the conflict he could only voice passing moods of all degrees between hope and despair. One day he would complain of his inability to concentrate on his writing "in a world almost entirely canceled, crumbled, tearing itself to pieces!" Another day he would apologize for such complaint,

realizing that every European artist was similarly thwarted and interrupted and that on the battlefield millions of individuals were forced to lay down their lives, not their pens. One day he would soberly analyze the society around him, commenting bitterly on man's separation from love and nature in time of strife, calling victory hollow, and lamenting that personal and national losses were not stirring people to approach the mysteries of life more seriously, responsibly, or sensitively. Another day he would exclaim: "Why are there not a few, three, five, ten, who stand together and cry in the public squares: Enough! and who will be shot down and at least have given their lives that it should be enough . . . ?"

He was not all despair as he looked toward tomorrow. He wrote, quite unprophetically as we know today: "I sometimes think that every day the war still lasts increases the obligation of humanity towards a great better-intentioned common future, for what could be more productive of obligation than the suffering augmented beyond all measure, which must after all join millions of people in all countries more closely together? Ah, then it will be possible to speak again, and every word of love or of art will find a new acoustic, a more open air and a wider space." Yet, when chaotic war was succeeded by chaotic peace, he held aloof from the Bavarians' efforts to create a government of the people. He gave a detailed and sympathetic account of a meeting of workers and intellectuals in a Munich beer-hall on November 7, 1918, just after the offer of armistice, but he was suspicious of the Bavarian Republic under Kurt Eisner and maintained that there must be a paradox in a writer's attitude toward revolution. Though the intellectual's superior insight makes him impatient of miscarried and muddled conditions, he must be an opponent of revolution, for he of all people knows how slowly all changes of lasting significance are accomplished, how inconspicuous they are and, through their very slowness, almost imperceptible." The forward drive of revolt is at first joyful and clean, Rilke believed, but soon is dominated by material aspirations and vengeful impulses till it becomes desperate and senseless.

Nothing could fully reconcile the poet to post-war Europe: not seeing Switzerland, nor visiting old friends, nor finding his beloved Paris relatively unaltered, nor even writing. He could not forget the vanished aristocratic Europe. "Where shall one go?" he wrote to Prince Schonburg. "In Germany particularly people like us will feel themselves strangers."

Rilke's letters are less interesting than his other work. Their phrasing is too considered and lacking in spontaneity, partly because he anticipated their publication. Moreover, he put down what he thought—and it is absorbed and absorbing thought, valuable in helping to explain his poetry—but all too rarely what was happening to him. Meditation and recollection and consolation of his friends for their sorrows are only occasionally balanced by the narrative and descriptive passages that are usually so large an element in correspondence. What we have, then, is not the story of everyday experience, but the journal of an alert, complex mind beset with problems which are still alive. For most readers that will be enough.

OTHER RECENT BOOKS:

J. CALDER JOSEPH: *Narration with a Red Piano.* The Little Man Press.
NELSON DEL BITTNER: *Paper Faces.* The Press of James A. Decker.

Because most of the slim, cloth-bound, high-priced volumes of poetry issued by commercial publishers have found a very small purchasing public, experiments in attractively printed one-man collections, paper-covered and low-priced, are again under way. James Laughlin, publisher of NEW DIRECTIONS, plans a series of some twelve a year at popular subscription. The Little Man Press of Cincinnati, edited by Robert Lowry, has a highly interesting selection of both poetry and prose out in pamphlet form. The attractively designed NARRATIVE WITH A RED PIANO is typical. PAPER FACES is the work of another commendable middle-western press, that of James A. Decker of Prairie City, Illinois.

NARRATION WITH A RED PIANO is the second collection by J. Calder Joseph of New York City. The people of his poems—builders, engineers, clerks, lovers, unemployed—stem from the city. Dreamers and failures, strong and weak, they are the variations in the crazily-paced symphony of life today. Mr. Joseph's themes and rhythms are strongly reminiscent of Gershwin's compositions. His "Street Corner" and "The Night was Slow and Easy" owe verbally much to Fearing; there is a little of Cummings in the handling of "Five O'Clock Dialogue" and "You and Me." But his themes and variations (the piano may or may not be red) are authentic Americana. Such a poem as "The Awakened Dreamers" indicates a sure and original power in selecting fragments of scenes and events that bring into focus the life, suffering, and needs of a great mass of humankind.

Since Joseph's expression is loose, governed chiefly by the device of free association, his work is more effective as a whole than in its components. Nelson Del Bittner's form is condensed, disciplined: each poem exists as a separate and memorable unit. They are less experimental than Joseph's, and less mannered. They are interestingly varied and denote several influences, but bear the stamp of no particular school or trend. Bittner moves from the simple lyric comment of "Ships" and "Prairie" to the elegiac "Day of Wrath"; from the metaphysical "Open and Outstretched and Humble" to sharp contemporary satire. To the latter category—in which he is perhaps at his best—belongs the title poem, an ironic observation of blank-faced, blank-minded escapists who accept time's ornaments "through the small end of the cornucopia." A timely satire, in view of the present agitation over Fifth Columnists, is "You May Be Talking to One Now." Bittner does much with the cheap bourgeois cafes and cabarets that are so vital a social comment on small middle-western cities—the cabarets that draw those

> Engendered in unlovely homes,
> Their lives undisciplined and bare,
> Thwarted of every natural love,
> Instructive only to despair,

and types like the old reporter of "Saturday Night" who had visions of another land and time:

> "Give the guy with the guitar a quarter, tell him
> In Babylon by the waters there is room
> To sit us down, lean back, and contemplate
> The beautiful adultress, her roving eye
> As painful as neuralgia in November."

Several of Bittner's poems, such as "Saturday Night," rank high among the distinguished output of the younger middle-western poets during the past decade.

RUTH LECHLITNER

GERTRUDE STEIN: *Paris France.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

This book, like FRENCH TRAITS, that brilliant study of the Gallic mind and character by W. C. Brownell, gives us the French people, their characteristic way of thinking and feeling. But Mr. Brownell writes as a scholar and critic, Miss Stein as an artist. He explains the French people; she sets us down—with her—in the midst of them.

> I was only four years old when I was first in Paris and talked French there and was photographed there and went to school there, and ate soup for early breakfast and had leg of mutton and spinach for lunch, I always liked spinach, and a black cat jumped on my mother's back.

That is on the first page. When we come to the end of the book, we have been to Paris and the provinces. We know Helene, the servant, and how she talks to her little boy, and Madame Pierlot, who is eighty-eight. We have seen Madame Chaboux and her butter-woman searching for Kiki Vincent, the horse which has been mobilized, and the villager sitting on his neighbor's chimney to spoil the ramequin. We have been there with those people, have heard the intonations of their voices, have understood how they feel. We know how they regard money and art and dogs. We understand the meaning of fashions and the relation of fashion to freedom and what it is to be civilized.

Miss Stein is there too, with ideas of her own, on the reason why writers have to have two countries, for instance, and on the relationship of impressionism to mass-production. The people of her book, actual though they may be, come to us through the medium of her consciousness. We catch the intonations of their voices only because she has a fine ear for speech and a peculiar interest in words. She is as evident as they. Both are charming, and one wishes the book were longer.

PARIS FRANCE is more than a mass of incident, however. Like Mr. Brownell, Miss Stein generalizes, often to the same effect as he. A comparison of passages will throw into interesting relief these two stylists, one writing in 1888, the other in the present. Mr. Brownell says:

> The Frenchman feels under no necessity of either disliking you or else becoming familiar by intruding his personality—which seems a not uncommon Anglo-Saxon affliction. We know best, perhaps, how to treat each other in intimacy; Frenchmen, in the general situation. FRATERNITE has slight relations to "Friendship," as Thoreau rhapsodizes about it, and as the classic examples illustrate it. In friendship the individual element is intensified, in fraternity it is extenuated.

And Miss Stein:

> A farmer naturally says such things in France but he is not intimate, he is not intimate with man, woman or child or animal, he is not intimate, it is not civilised to be intimate and the French need to be civilised and in order to do so he must have tradition and freedom and with tradition and freedom one cannot be intimate with any one.

Throughout this book there is a note of urgency. Its anecdotal, apparently quite rambling matter is brought continually to focus on three points: logic, fashion, civilization. They run like a refrain throughout the whole, and the importance of making us understand these things now, as the French understand them, has urged Miss Stein into intelligibility—I had almost said lucidity. For it is France, she believes, whose work it must be to civilize the 20th Century. The book was written in the fall of 1939.

Today, in spite of the irony with which events have darkened every page, there are yet passages which give us comfort, even hope:

> So the most striking thing about France is the family and the terre, the soil of France. Revolutions come and revolutions go, fashions come and fashions go, logic and civilisation remain and with it the family and the soil of France.

And this about the school-boy weeping on the quay in Paris, a woman beside him:

> What is it, I asked her, oh, she said sorrow but it will pass. He has failed in his examinations, but it will pass. And quite impersonally she sat by and indeed it was sorrow, but as she said, sorrow passes.

GARRETA BUSEY

SIGRID UNDSET: *Madame Dorthea.* Alfred A. Knopf.

The essential theme of Sigrid Undset's KRISTIN LAVRANSDATTER—a woman's struggle against violence and dissolution—dominates her new novel, MADAME DORTHEA. Only at the psychological core, however, are the two novels identical. For instead of the turbulence of medieval Norway, there is behind the events in MADAME DORTHEA the flat, quiet canvas of provincial Norway in the late eighteenth century. And because of this difference in her environment, Dorthea struggles less picturesquely, more symbolically with Kristin's enemy—brutality and the deeds of darkness.

It has been Thestrup's strength which has kept Dorthea from stumbling beyond safety and peace into the outer confines of violence. Setting out in the storm to find their two eldest sons, this husband who is lover and friend to Dorthea meets with some unrevealed accident. Long after the two sons are safely returned to her, Dorthea

waits and hopes. And out of the void of Thestrup's absence comes no sign to show that he is alive or dead. And then, quietly but in swift succession, comes blow after soft blow to her quickening consciousness of evil and distress. Insignificant in scope when isolated, they take on the appearance together of swiftly moving catastrophe. Only the loss of her husband has been a shock of great magnitude. But this calamity has been heightened by the subsequent raids on her domestic security—the horror she feels when she is exposed to the raw events in the household of her friend, Captain Cold, the bitter quarrel of her two sons over the virtue of a peasant girl, the revelation of the rather sordid past of her own much-married mother. The events of a few swift months have sent her two eldest children from her and laid upon her shoulders the burden of caring for the five smaller ones in a new and difficult environment.

The darkness of individual consciousness, of the inevitable separateness of lives and minds, is portrayed as an accentuation of the forces of evil which surround Dorthea's life, as they surrounded Kristin's, though muted and reduced here by the difference in environment. When Vilhelm Adolf, Dorthea's eldest son, eavesdrops on the revelations about his grandmother's past, he is started already upon the road which Dorthea entered upon only with the loss of her husband. "It was as though he had made the sudden discovery that all human beings were enclosed each in his own invisible shell—invisible, but no less impenetrable for all that." This consciousness of an inscrutable, night-harbored life in the memory and in the passions lends a light and shade effect to the style of the book, even in translation. Light is the daytime life of reason and domestic security, but dark and threatening the force of brutality, the prophecies of the old gypsy, Sibilla, the superstititions of both the peasants and the old German Catholic, the foreman under Thestrup in the glassworks. The accumulated details to be found in some of the author's earlier work are missing here, except in the very effective portrayal of a bucolic Norwegian wedding.

The reader will look in vain for any reflection in MADAME DORTHEA of that larger violence bred in our own time to destroy not only families but whole cultures and races. Sigrid Undset's latest novel is an artistic and restrained telling in brief of a well-tried theme, a woman's struggle against the forces which threaten her own private world.

W. McNEIL LOWRY

CARSON McCULLERS: *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.* Houghton Mifflin.

I have read many better novels, but few lovelier titles than THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER. It promises poetry, tranquil understanding, warmth, and love. I don't know who wrote that line; perhaps Carson McCullers, who offers this as her first novel. But long after I have forgotten Mr. Singer, the deaf-mute; and Jake Blount, the ranting drunken Marxist; and Mick, the gangling schoolgirl whose head swims with great music; and the sick proud Negro, Dr. Copeland; and Biff, who watches them all sadly and puzzled from the counter of his cafe—long after these people and their unhappy neighbors have died in my recollection and I walk the grim, dark streets of Miss McCullers' middling Southern town alone, her title will sing in my head, an unfulfilled promise.

You wonder at first how a twenty-two-year-old writer could have visualized those secret people, but you don't wonder long. They are a mystic fellowship, yet the impersonations of a frustrate unripe imagination. A lonesome and self-tortured imagination, one guesses.

Mr. Singer, a queer sad gentle fellow, is eaten by his sterile love for another deaf-mute, who becomes insane and is taken away. Mr. Singer is intelligent and generous, but the others are attracted to him more because his silence seems to bespeak immense wisdom. The three who hunt solace in Mr. Singer's understanding—the drinker, the sick doctor, and the adolescent girl—misunderstand and dislike one another. When Mr. Singer kills himself finally on learning of his friend's death, the others disperse more broken and lost than before.

That is the size of the story: a gray town and five rebellious souls, all inflamed with intelligence and love, yet each in some way impotent, all dying of the community's starveling brutality and each dying of his own silent exasperation. They are aimless flakes of insight swimming for a little on top of depths and depths of frustration, caught at last in little whirlpools and sucked under.

This novel might be arresting if it didn't conform entirely to a tired formula. The people who live here inhabit an America clipped of beauty, humor, freedom, and ethics. It is a starving America, brutalized before it has been softened by contentment. Its poor are legion. Sweated by the machine or broken on the wheel of misunderstanding, some of them become criminal or mad as the plot thickens. They don't enjoy the taste of their food. Their jokes aren't funny. They drink without joy, love

without ecstasy, dream without forgetting. The details of their living are real enough, but only the unpleasant realities count.

Well now, is it really as bad as that? Is this the sickness of the country or the diseased fancy of several hundred younger novelists who have read Karl Marx and read the papers and gone sour? Miss McCullers almost defines the more positive aesthetic view that might leaven such writing. She seems to sense that something is wanting, but like her tuberculous Negro doctor she writes, "Prognosis: I don't know." In the end what she has done is write a meticulous report in clean American English, a diagnosis of what's eating her country and a prognosis: "I don't know." But a novel must in the nature of things be something more. If Miss McCullers and many of her contemporaries cannot see it, others can, and others will. There's no need to disparage the findings of such lonely hunters. They are honest, able, sincere. Only there are more things in heaven and earth, even in America, than are dreamt of in their philosophy.

MAX PUTZEL

JAKE FALSTAFF: *Jacoby's Corners.* Houghton Mifflin Company

Jake Falstaff is the pen name of Herman Fetzer, who died in 1935. His selected poems, THE BULLS OF SPRING (1937), were widely praised. His second posthumous volume is comprised of eighteen chapters of reminiscences of boyhood in rural Ohio, some of them reprinted from the CLEVELAND PRESS. No doubt a large audience was delighted by the separate sketches and will welcome this collection. Yet as a book it is slight and scattered. Dozens of yarns and hundreds of rural sights, sounds, and smells, rural customs and sayings are recorded, but not much is made of them. The "chapters" are made by stringing assorted subjects together with fake transitions, a fault which might not be noticeable in a newspaper column but which becomes painfully conspicuous in the book.

One chapter is an exception; the charming account of how the boy Lemuel tried to win a pony through selling a patent blueing powder achieves the continuity and structure of a story. Had Jake Falstaff lived, he might have brought the whole book up to this level, for he had the skill, and much that he merely mentions and passes over aches to be fully written.

CHARLES SHATTUCK

PETER VIERTEL: *The Canyon.* Harcourt, Brace.

This book is a first novel, actually a first novelette. According to the jacket, the author is only nineteen years old. About the only evidence of juvenile authorship, however, is the style, and since the story is told in the first person, by a boy, the reader might assume that the bad grammar in the narrative parts, the somewhat meager descriptions, and the curiously vague characterizations of the narrator's parents are deliberate. The book might well be the nostalgic reminiscence of a middle-aged man who likes neatly constructed stories and has studied Steinbeck's OF MICE AND MEN.

Mr. Viertel opens his chronicle with a description of the Canyon where a Mexican village lies, where the boys of a small California coast town play all day long and sometimes half the night. He closes with an account of a disastrous flood that washes away the village and scours the Canyon clean of all the narrator's precious associations. The unifying element is the Canyon, which is skillfully built into a symbol of George's life before he goes away to college. Most male readers will easily translate the Canyon into another symbol of their own boyhood. George's story will certainly gratify those of us who enjoy recalling—and who doesn't?—our own boyish deviltries, our boyish day-dreams, our early fumblings with girls—George, by the way, is more precocious in love than are most boys of his age—and our first agonizings about God and religion. The only character who is fully alive is George, the narrator. His playmates, Jimmy Valentine, Perfecto the Mexican, and Keetcheye the half-breed bad boy of the neighborhood, are not altogether convincing as little boys but come to life as adolescents. Betsy, who introduces George to sex, never seems to be a little girl, but since she is the daughter of a jockey she may have a right to prematurity. None of the adult characters emerges clearly, though two bartenders have possibilities. A nostalgic pall of lost boyhood hangs over the whole book.

"Don't make the mistake," writes the author near the close, "of thinking that these are sentimental regrets." I confess that I did make just that mistake. I am not sure, however, that it is a mistake. Mr. Viertel is obviously very self-conscious about sentimentality, and it is perfectly natural and proper that he should try to avoid becoming sentimental in this boy's story. But he can't prevent his readers from indulging in sentimental recollections as they watch George and Jimmy and Perfecto and Keetcheye playing in the Canyon. Mr. Viertel need not worry about the charge of sentimentality. He has written a very readable book which many people will enjoy.

MARVIN T. HERRICK

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